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THE UNFORGOTTEN PRISONER

THE UNFORGOTTEN PRISONER

By

R. C. HUTCHINSON

Author of "The Answering Glory"



CASELL
AND COMPANY LIMITED
LONDON, TORONTO, MELBOURNE
AND SYDNEY

TO
MY WIFE

AUTHOR'S NOTE

For convenience in telling this story I have taken liberties with the chronological order of such historical circumstances as condition parts of the action.

The characters are wholly imaginary.

R. C. H.

PART ONE

THE UNFORGOTTEN PRISONER

I

WHEN I heard my father calling "Charles!" from his study I knew that trouble was coming. From where I sat in a window just below my father's, I had seen my brother walk down the path, smoking industriously and pausing to admire the hollyhocks, and disappear behind the greenhouse. From that point, as I knew well enough, he could get to the orchard and make his way through to what we called the Land of the Midianites without being seen from the house; not so easily as a few years before, since he had his full six feet now, and a mighty breadth of the shoulders; but it was late July and everything helped him.

Fräulein von Schlingen had, I suspected—and my father knew—gone down the drive in the front of the house, along as far as the farm and then by Lark Lane to the old barns, where you could get into the Land of the Midianites simply by climbing over the padlocked gate. My father, I say, knew. He could not have seen her further than where the drive turned left and disappeared behind the box-hedge; but he had a country rector's simple, direct knowledge of human nature, and it was not very hard for him to guess. He did not know the long way round as Charles and I knew it—as a last desperate chance if you were cut off in the orchard when the other hiders were all home—but he knew Lark Lane well enough as a source of worry and expense and argument with the neighbouring farmers. Fräulein von Schlingen might, of course, have gone to the farm for eggs or honey; but Charles, leaving the house only three minutes later, had been loafing far too plainly. It was not a habit of Charles to loaf on a sultry afternoon when there was the river to bathe in only three miles away.

"Charles!"

The voice was louder this time, and rather angry. My brother, if he heard it, must know that he was not summoned merely to do something in the garden. But if he had wandered out along the lane he had some excuse for not hearing it—he might be half a mile away.

I decided to go and look for him. Five years his senior, I felt my responsibilities, and whatever trouble there was would be made worse by his not answering the summons. Even I, at last recognized as having come to maturity, had to answer my father's calls like a well-trained terrier.

Downstairs I met my mother, her face anxious and her hands letting fall one by one the flowers she was carrying. She asked me: "Have you seen Charles anywhere? Father's calling for him." I said I thought he was in the Land of the Midianites, and was going to look for him. She said: "Do hurry!"

I felt sleepy and rather bad tempered as I went down the garden, a little vexed with Charles myself for playing the fool with Mabel's governess instead of coming to bathe with me. I called as I went: "Charles! Father wants you!" more to cool the impatience of my father than with any hope of it reaching my brother's ears. Instead of going through the orchard I turned into the chicken-run and climbed on to one of the fowl-houses where, holding to the netted fencing, I could balance on the edge of the sloping roof. High above the currant and gooseberry bushes, I had a long view round half a circle. I could catch no sight of my brother. I moved cautiously along the roof, bringing a further small segment into my field of observation. Then I saw Charles, standing in a corner between hedge and haystack, motionless as a dead man with Hedwig locked tight in his arms.

For two seconds or more I stood still and watched them, filled with a curious excitement. Then I jumped down, stood irresolute for a moment, and called twice "Charles!"

At first he did not seem to hear me, but presently I saw them both coming towards me through the orchard.

They were walking hand in hand. My brother was rather red in the face and looked foolish, with a hint of obstinacy in his mouth. But my eyes left him and fixed on Hedwig; not rudely, for her gaze met mine. Shy with women as I was then, I had hardly looked into her face before, except in a quick glance when she addressed me at table, and till many years after I did not look into it again. I always think of her now as two women; one with the face I saw that July afternoon, haloed by rich brown hair, the chin held high, the lips apart a little and smiling, her eyes deep, mysterious and happy; and the other, a cold, white face. When I think ill of women, when I feel for a time that they are vain and petty, a feeble shadow of a man's great humanity, my thoughts go back to that orchard lying in the sunshine, where I saw for the first time the whole magnificence of a woman's beauty and realized—though not as I realize now—its place and purpose in

reality; and often when Lanair has savagely paced my room, squeezing his fist and cursing: "I tell you, John, beauty's the most damnable thing in creation!" those two images have stood before my mind, carved in a substance tougher than mere memory.

I said: "Oh, Charles, father's been calling you."

He stopped a few paces from me.

"Has he? What does he want?"

"I don't know. You'd better buck up and go."

Hedwig said: "Shall I come too?"

"I think better not," I said quickly, smiling to show that I was friendly.

"All right, come on!" said Charles.

We left her standing in her white dress with one hand resting on the trunk of an apple-tree, and walked together towards the house. Glancing back over my shoulder I saw that her eyes followed my brother, her right arm raised to shield them from the sun.

Charles asked me: "What does the old fool want?"

I said: "I don't know. Trouble, I'm afraid."

We went upstairs together, and then I left him to go on up to my father's room alone. But a moment later my father called me and I joined them in the study. Charles was leaning with his back against the long bookcase, his seat resting on the top of the lower portion which held the Britannica and Hewartson's commentaries, his fingers in his jacket pockets with the thumbs outside. My father sat in his padded desk-chair with his back to the light. His long legs (he was taller than either of us boys) were stretched out, his ankles crossed. His wrists rested on his stomach and his hands met with the fingers stretched. Only his thumbs moved, tapping together impatiently as they did when his mind wandered in the middle of a sermon.

"I think you had better be here, John," he said. "This applies to you too if—if necessary."

But I think he really wanted me to increase the congregation, for he was unaccustomed to be without that stimulus.

He turned to Charles.

"Perhaps I am wrong," he said, "but I imagine that you have been getting—very friendly towards Miss Schlingen?"

Charles hesitated, and then said: "Yes, Father."

"You were with her just now?"

(I prayed that Father would not notice any slight disorder in Charles's appearance.)

"Yes, Father."

"You met, having arrived at your rendezvous by different routes?"

"Yes, Father."

Loathing the wretched interview, I cursed Charles for his stupid honesty, as from time to time I have cursed him all through life. In another mood my father could have been met by frankness, but any duffer should have seen that this moment was one for diplomacy. By slow degrees and with unremitting patience he could be brought round to sympathy with the most unlikely people or positions, and the process needed nothing so much as a little harmless lying in the opening stages.

My father shifted one hand to his chin and the other to his trouser pocket. With a wriggle of the brows he slipped his spectacles a little way down his nose so that he could look at Charles over the rims.

"It was, in fact, a clandestine meeting?"

Again my brother's wits failed to help him. He did not even jib at the portentous "clandestine."

"Yes, Father."

My father moistened his lips with the elaborate twisting and folding that men whom he taught at Rugby still imitate. Raising his knees, he brought his seat forward a little and let his shoulders fall lower into his chair. Then he rubbed his right eye with his second finger.

"There are some things," he said, "which a father assumes are obvious to his son. It's very disappointing to find that they are not. Miss Schlingen is a pleasant and well-educated young woman. I should be very much upset if anyone in this house failed to treat her with kindness and—and in a normal friendly way."

He paused, and I could hardly forbear a smile as I saw him glance down, instinctively looking for his notes.

"But you are old enough to realize, Charles, that there is a difference between friendliness and—and any sort of intimacy." (Thinking of my view from the fowl-house I glanced at Charles to see how he took "any sort of intimacy." His face betrayed no emotion, but I could see from the line of his jaw that his teeth were clenched.) "When a young woman sees that a young man's friendliness is becoming an attempt at intimacy, she must do one thing or the other. She must either avoid the young man completely, or else allow him—in a modest way—to cultivate her society, believing that the young man's intentions are honourable."

I saw Charles's lips open a little, and I thought he was going to speak. But he said nothing.

My father went on. "Miss Schlingen has not that choice. She cannot avoid the society of either of you boys so long as she remains in this house, and to leave it would mean giving up her employment. Her mother, I understand, is not well-to-do, and that step might be a very serious one. If you put yourselves in her place you will see that her position is an embarrassing one, and that she might well be tempted, if not forced, to make a pretence of encouraging intimacy in order not to create trouble. Girls are very emotional at that age, and there is a grave risk, more than a grave risk, of such philandering developing into a love-affair. Now a man can do a woman no greater wrong, cannot be more cruel, than by playing on the romantic side of her nature and leading her to think that his feelings are serious. No gentleman, I say, no real gentleman, will ever do such a thing as that. If I thought——"

It was I who said, as coolly as I could: "But if his intentions are serious——?"

Charles gave me a grateful look, which my father missed.

"I do not see how they could be," my father answered shortly. "I don't have to tell you boys how to put on your shirts and neckties, and I don't expect to have to tell you where you should place your romantic affections. I have nothing to say against Miss Schlingen. She is a pleasant young woman, and almost English in her manners. Neither would I think of referring to her as a servant; but she is a foreigner, and she performs services in this house for which she is paid. That, I think, should be sufficient reason for——"

"What difference does that make?" Charles spoke in an unnatural voice coming from the back of his throat, and he hardly opened his mouth to let the words pass.

My father pulled his chair round to face his desk, and spoke over his shoulder.

"I do not boast," he said, "even in the presence of my own family, about who we are and who our fathers have been. There is a history of the Saggards in the dining-room bookcase—it's in a brown paper wrapping on the bottom shelf. You may like to refresh your memories. Well, I hope I shall not have to refer to that matter again."

He reached for his Bible, opened it, and running the forefinger of his left hand down the page he began to write. Charles waited for a moment, then left the room. I followed him.

I followed him into the schoolroom, where he filled and lit his pipe, picked up the *Field* and threw himself into the wicker chair. I went over to the window and stood there, looking out across the garden. There was no sign of Hedwig. Cragg was wheeling an

empty barrow very slowly down the path towards the shady part behind the cherry wall. He would stay there most of the afternoon, bent over in a stoop that was more natural to his body than the erect position, snatching at a weed, patting the soil with his trowel, chewing and muttering, snatching again. I did not blame him, for the garden, lying still and sleepy in the yellow sunshine, asked only to be left alone. A hen somewhere had laid an egg, and bade the world take notice; but hardly a leaf was stirring, and right over to Warden Hill, where there was still no house to puff smoke from the kitchen chimney, the country lay as if fixed for ever on canvas by the brush of a painter. Things could go more easily now. Uncle George, mercifully altering his will a month before his death, had banished the question of leaving the Rectory. Far-away troubles with the Dutch farmers had been settled, and that page could be turned over. Within the lives of the old men the new machinery had seemed to be more a curse than a blessing, but we understood the machine now, the system was established, and people were working in the new way. We would look round the world and wonder if everything else were worth possessing. The rumblings and bickerings at Westminster could be compressed quite neatly into a few columns of the big daily newspaper. From Sheffield and Manchester the small cheap houses were still creeping out into the country, drowning the villages in their advance; but the outward thrust would not go on for ever, and there was still mile after mile to go before the disease of brick and slate would infect the places where gentlemen lived, away from the restless stirring of new societies called Trade Unions. There had been a fear that our furious progress would carry us into an unaccustomed world. But the world remained to let us enjoy peacefully our sense of accomplishment. Horses pulled tramway-cars through the streets of Cambridge, but the postman still came across the fields on foot from the village to the Rectory. The garden slept between its high, brown walls, Cragg moved his barrow another yard and let it rest again, and sitting in his padded desk-chair my father spoke to his sons about the honour of a gentleman, about the romantic emotions of young women, about dangerous intimacy, about the rank of our forbears, the clock above him ticking domestically as the words fell out from the fathers' book of all the centuries.

To me my father's words had made the whole matter unimportant, by their lack of eloquence. I had felt, as I stood watching from the roof of the fowl-house and the unexpected scene stirred my own emotions, that I was witness of a great and pregnant event. Had my father stormed and raved, called Heaven to witness and

vowed to disown his son, I should have tingled still with the sense of battle and of destiny waiting to be answered. He had neither raised his voice nor changed his colour. He had seized hold of the drama, vibrant with possibility, and crammed it into a textbook of etiquette. The smooth flow of life had passed over the incident, hardly noticing its faint resistance. Charles was a young man, Hedwig was a young woman, a foreigner in my father's pay, and dinner would be at eight-thirty.

Charles startled me when he spoke. He said: "Hedwig's mother is a baroness or something, isn't she?"

His voice was very quiet and controlled, but when I turned round I saw that he was looking towards the fireplace, away from me.

I said carelessly: "Yes, I believe so. Most people are, in that part of the world."

He turned his head a little and half looked at me. "You're very funny," he said.

I apologized. "I didn't mean to be flippant, old chap. It's—a rotten business for you."

"It's bloody," he answered.

I felt so helpless before his wretchedness that I decided I could only leave him. But when I got to the door he stopped me.

"If her mother's a baroness," he said, "what the hell does father mean by talking about her as if she was a kitchen-maid or something?"

I could think of no reasonable reply. "Father's an extraordinary ass over some things," I said. Then, to cover up my blasphemy, "Of course, he's getting on, you know. He's old-fashioned in his views about foreigners, and even if he realized about Hedwig he may think——"

"He doesn't think. He does nothing but preach." He pulled the mouthpiece out of his pipe and blew through it violently. "He's so—damned insulting."

I thought he was on the verge of tears. I said sheepishly, almost in a whisper: "If I can do anything, have a talk with father or anything, I will."

Charles said "Thanks," and fearing that I did not understand his curtness he raised his arm (without turning to face me) and gave my hand a little shake. Then he walked over to the window and I went off to bathe by myself.

There was another scene in my father's study a week later, but I was in London at the time and no one told me much about it.

* * * * *

It was probably about two o'clock in the morning (a fortnight after this) when I woke out of a vivid dream and, as consciousness

came to me slowly, realized that Charles was out of bed. I lay quite still listening to his movements as he opened a drawer, moved a chair, and padded once or twice over the bare floor. When he passed the window and his figure was outlined against the pale light I could just see that he was not in his pyjamas. I wondered vaguely what he was up to. If he thought there was a flea in his bed, why didn't he light a candle? It was unlike Charles to have any compunction about disturbing me. I think I dozed for a few minutes, and when I half woke again he was still moving about. Without raising my head I murmured: "I say, what the devil are you doing?"

Charles started so violently that I felt the vibration transmitted through my bed. He said indistinctly something about prunes.

"You're a long time about it," I grumbled. "Can't you find the door or something?"

He said: "Oh, go to sleep!"

I replied, almost asleep already: "How can I, with you crashing about the place?"

He made no answer to this, and I pulled the clothes over my head and went back into my dream near the place where I had left it.

In the morning I noticed that my brother's bed was empty, and I felt that this fact connected itself with something I had dreamt; but the dream, clear as reality a few moments before, was now only an elusive colour in my consciousness. There was nothing unusual in Charles getting up early; he had a faculty for this which I repeatedly told him was possessed only by men of small intelligence, and he was probably out riding. I thought no more about it, and began to shave.

The gong sounded before my face was lathered and, dressing in a scramble, I noticed only by accident a note which Charles had left on the corner of my chest of drawers. It was probably to ask did I mind his keeping Grey Lady until luncheon, as he wanted to ride over to see one of his friends. I stuffed it in my pocket and hurried down to the dining-room, where I found two empty places. Hedwig had not come down.

It was half an hour after breakfast and I was in the tool-house oiling a cricket bat when my mother called and asked me if I knew where Charles was. I said "no," but a moment later I remembered the note and took it out to read it. It was very badly written in pencil—Charles must have scrawled it in the semi-darkness of the bedroom just before he left.

"DEAR J.,

"Hedwig and I have gone to get married. You had better break this to Father."

[There was a line under this, but a postscript had been added.]
"Sorry I didn't say anything, but you might have been attacked by sense of duty or something, which would have made things awkward for you. I would rather you didn't sound the alarm till about twelve, as we shall want a decent start. C."

I burnt the note and spent a rather unhappy morning wandering over the fields by Hale Cross. At first the excitement—breaking in on a pleasant but rather dull holiday—had a relish, but in reflecting on the matter I saw by degrees what a fool Charles had made of himself and how far-reaching the consequences would be. Not that I blamed him; only his quickness off the mark had prevented me from being in love with Hedwig myself; but he was still up at Cambridge, and he showed no signs of ability for anything but football; we were not a wealthy family, despite Uncle George's legacy, and even if we could support Charles we could not support his wife and a possible family. Things were going to be pretty bad, I thought.

I was home shortly before twelve, and I found my father fussing rather helplessly in the hall.

He said: "Oh, here you are! Where have you been all morning? Do you know where Charles is? Have you seen anything of Miss von Schlingen?"

I said I had seen nothing of either.

"Yes, but do you know where they are?"

I replied that I did not.

"I want you to go down to the station," he said. "You can take my bicycle. No, I want you to go to Wilson's and telephone to the station and ask—no, I'll give you a note to take to the station."

His anxiety was pathetic, and all my sympathy was with him at that moment. But even as I stood by his side, looking no doubt extremely foolish, I savoured the comedy of his behaviour, his refusal to admit finally to himself what was so plainly the truth, his reluctance to let me share his anxiety, crowned by his futile wish to get my help without giving me the means to help him. He knew, of course, nothing about Charles's note, but it seemed scarcely believable that he could think me unaware of the grounds of his fears. I almost smiled as I thought, at that moment, of how he had explained to me on my eighteenth birthday the means by which babies came into the world; information which—by the indiscretion of a boy three years my senior—I had possessed for exactly ten years.

"Don't bother to write," I said. "I'll go straight to the station and ask Sandy if he's seen—either of them. If he has I'll find out which train they went by."

My father turned his eyes on me sharply, trying to read what I was thinking.

"I can hardly believe—of course, they might have gone on the spree somewhere. A stupid lark!"

I found Sandy at the station, and he knew nothing. Thomas, however, was summoned, and he knew a great deal, which he was quite willing to tell. "I only saw the back of him just as I slammed the door," he said, "but I did say to myself: 'That's just like young Mr. Saggard,' I said, and——"

I cut him short. "Was Fräulein—was anyone with him?"

"Well, I thought I saw a young lady inside the——"

"Yes," I said, "they were travelling together. They were going to Peddall to see the show."

"Peddall, did you say, sir?"

"Ycs."

"But it wasn't that train they got in. It was the early Peterborough. The one that stops at Peddall don't go till an hour after."

"That's just what I thought," I told him. "My brother made a mistake about the train. It's very annoying for him. . . ."

"But I thought I heard him——"

I could waste no more time inventing explanations, and I went back into Sandy's office. Sandy, I could see, had already guessed as much as I knew, but he would be discreet. I set him to work looking up connections while I sat and smoked, trying to make my mind clear as to my position. My brother's case was won; whatever happened my father could no longer talk dispassionately of "serious intentions" or regard Charles's feelings with the contempt one has for a child's whims. There would be tremendous parleys, of course. Charles would be asked to think things over, to reconsider his feelings. A period of separation would be advised. But Charles had demonstrated beyond all argument that he meant business. The demonstration had gone far enough. He couldn't get married all in a moment; there was time to stop him, and I meant to do it. It was the first time I had played on the opposite side in anything important; it went against me, but——

"Mr. Charles would have had to wait over an hour for the London train," Sandy said.

Over an hour. Bad planning. Charles of course had no head for making schemes, but surely Hedwig would have seen the danger; over an hour in a place like Peterborough, when suspicions might already have been aroused at the Rectory.

"You think it was London they were making for, sir?" Sandy asked.

"I don't know. I suppose so. They would have had to go to London to get anywhere else, France or anywhere. Of course, I've no idea——"

"Not Scotland?"

"It's possible," I said.

"Free and easy customs in those parts," Sandy said significantly. His thumb was resting on the time-table and with the nail he made a mark on the page. "There's the Glasgow train, the extra-mail as they call it, that stops at Peterborough. They wouldn't have had to wait more than a quarter of an hour for that."

I thought it was not too unlikely, and I asked Sandy to telephone to Peterborough. It took some time to get the call through, and then we had to wait for ten minutes, perhaps longer, taking it in turns to hold the receiver while inquiries were being made. But my father's name carried some weight, and we were lucky. A porter who had been on duty earlier in the morning was eventually summoned to the telephone. He had seen the train come in. Yes. There was a young gentleman, rather wild-looking, with a young lady who spoke in a queer accent. Yes, he remembered, because they had given him two shillings, and only two small cases, quite light ones. No, he couldn't remember, he thought he had put them in a cab. No, no, he remembered now, he had put them in the extra-mail, the Glasgow train, that was.

It would be the devil, I reflected, if rumours got into the Close at Peterborough; but I had no more patience for making explanations. I asked the man his name, thanked him for his trouble and put up the receiver. Without waiting to say more to Sandy—he was at the grill answering an old woman's inquiries about tickets for children—I mounted my bicycle and rode back to the village, where I sent a telegram costing nearly ten shillings to a friend in Glasgow, David Holmes. I gave him a brief description of Charles and Hedwig, asked him to meet the train, find them, see where they went, and if possible follow them. That, I thought, was the best David could do, supposing that he were smart enough to pick them out from the crowd arriving at the station.

That was my own chief part in this affair, and I am no longer so proud of my cleverness as I was then.

I met my father as I came out of the post office. He was very hot and his limp seemed to be worse. Between his hurried explanations—the mare had been in the meadow and couldn't be caught, one of the linch-pins had been missing—he grumbled at me for my slowness. What had I been doing all this time? Why hadn't I got hold of someone and sent back a message? Had I had an accident

with the bicycle? I persuaded him to get into the trap again and took the reins. I had tickled the mare into a fine trot on the road to the station before I made my explanations.

"I've found out where they've gone," I said briefly. "Glasgow."

We had reached the station by the time he had digested this fact. I looked at the station clock and saw that the Peterborough train would be in in ten minutes. My father followed me into the waiting-room and we sat down.

"What shall we do?" he asked simply.

"There's a train to Peterborough in ten minutes. We might be lucky enough to get a good connection. We can leave the trap with Sandy—he can send a message and Mabel will come down for it."

"Yes," he said slowly, "we could leave the trap."

"I've sent a telegram to David Holmes to find out where they go. We ought to get to Glasgow——"

"Yes," he said, "yes. Have you bought the tickets?"

I borrowed some money from Sandy and got the tickets.

"Do you think——?" my father asked, and then, changing his mind, said: "Yes. We had better go."

At that moment the train came in.

* * * * *

We had very little time to wait at Peterborough, just long enough for me to buy food for us to eat in the train. That is nearly all I remember of the details of that long, dreadful journey. We cannot have been alone in the carriage, for the train was one of the two fastest in the day, but I cannot recall the appearance or even the sex of our companions. I sat opposite to my father, and the image which remains clear in my mind is that of his spare figure, bolt upright, in the shabby old clerical jacket; of his face, very white, with the lips held firm and close and his eyes set strangely forward, unseeing, beneath the grey eyebrows. There was nobility in that expression, no fear and no defeat; but his eyes, fixed on my face yet never meeting mine, frightened me. I do not think he spoke throughout the journey except to ask me the time or what stations we had passed. I asked him twice if he was comfortable, but he did not answer me. When at last I dared, I opened a *Cornhill* I had bought and started furtively to read a story. (The plot of that story has long since gone from my memory, but the name of the heroine was Alice McPrae.) I did not read for long. My father, I believe, was not even aware that the magazine lay on my lap, but whenever I glanced up I saw his eyes still set, mysterious and

unblinking, and I had the feeling that to read a story in that presence was like singing and dancing on a father's grave. I dozed for a while, shortly before we crossed the border, and when I woke I found him still upright and motionless. It was a little after midnight when we reached Queen Street station.

I took my father into the station hotel—he was almost childlike in his submission—and when I had made him comfortable in the coffee-room with a glass of hot rum at his elbow I took a cab and drove to Cheviott Square. David's rooms were on the ground floor of a students' boarding-house, and when I rang the bell he came himself to let me in. He was in his dressing-gown, but there was a fire in his sitting-room and he told me that he had been sitting up reading. The haze of tobacco-smoke confirmed his statement.

Yes, he had got my telegram. He had met the train at the station and more by luck than by cunning he had seen a couple who seemed to answer to my description. He had taken a cab behind theirs and followed them to a cheap hotel in the Howe Street quarter, probably chosen for them by the cabby, where they had booked a room under the name Mr. and Mrs. Lander. And after that? After that they went back to the station, and he had lost sight of them. They had returned to the hotel very late, only a little while before midnight.

"How far is the hotel from the station?" I asked him.

"About a mile. Difficult to find if you don't know this place."

"They booked a double room?"

"Yes," he said.

He had finished his story and for a few moments he did not speak to me, dear kind fellow that he was. He had taken out his knife and seemed wholly occupied in scraping out the bowl of his pipe. At last he said:

"Who are they? Or would it be better if I didn't ask?"

I told him: "My brother and a German girl."

"I guessed that," he said.

"I've got my father here—at the station," I went on. "He's half paralysed with the shock, and I don't know what to do next."

"You'd better drink something," David said.

I felt that I should be making a move, but I was dead tired and I sat still and sipped the whisky which David mixed for me.

David said: "If I can do anything, have a word with your father or anything, I will."

I started to explain things, how the affair had started, my father's attitude, my own conflicting feelings. I spoke rapidly, intending to be off back to the station, and being hardly awake I was jumbling

all my words and phrases, but David listened patiently, gravely nodding his head.

"And now I can't see where I am," I said. I had got to my feet and was standing on the fender with my elbows on the mantel-piece. "I felt it was the sane thing to stop them, I've dragged father up here to do it, and now I feel somehow—one can't. You see what I mean? I thought they would hide for a bit somewhere and not do anything till——"

"I think you'd better stop them, even now," he broke in. He crossed the room as he spoke and picked up an old overcoat which was lying on the floor. "I'm a bachelor," he said, "and I know only one thing about marriage—that it's no damn good rushing the business. There may be a whole clan to pay for the mistakes."

Without waiting for me to debate his advice he picked up my hat and gave it to me, threw a lump of coal on the fire, and led the way out into the street.

"The hotel's not far from here if you take all the short cuts," he said. "Shall we go straight there, or had we better get your father?"

I thought for a moment and said: "Better not."

There was a police-station on our route and from there I telephoned to the station hotel. The night porter answered me and I told him to find out if Canon Saggard had gone to bed. Returning in a few moments, he said that the gentleman was still in the coffee-room, fast asleep in a chair. I gave instructions that he was to be provided with night things and helped into bed; and a message that I would be back very soon. Then we walked on fast through the dark, echoing streets.

It was hard to keep up with David's long strides, but he held me by the arm and helped me forward; had he not done so I would have collided with every lamp-post, for though the air freshened me—it was quite cold now—I was too weary to have a normal control of my limbs. My brain seemed to clear, but it was running at unnatural speed into paths remote and twisting, and the silent houses looming above, the row of cloudy street lamps nodding in my tired vision, gave me the sensation that I was walking in my sleep. Several times I fingered carefully the seam of my trousers. More than once I had to make a mental effort to remember where I was going and why.

"This is the place," David said, and we stopped before a tall, narrow, flat-fronted house, built hard against the pavement and distinguished from its neighbours only by the colour of the wash. The street lamp was just near enough for me to read the words "London Hotel, Pension" on a board above the lowest window.

We tugged at the bell-pull, but the wire was broken. There was no knocker, and we had to rap with our fists on the door. We had hammered for some time, our blows making a terrifying noise in the surrounding silence, before we heard sounds within and a dull light showed through the frosted glass above the lintel. The bolt was drawn back, a key turned and the door was opened a few inches by an old woman who asked furiously what we wanted.

"There is a Mr. Lander staying here," David said; "we wish to see him."

"Well, you can't," she replied, and pushed the door. But David's foot was inside.

"There's going to be trouble for you if you're not civil," he said sternly, and pushing the door open he walked into the passage. "We have important news for Mr. Lander. Will you get him, please?"

His *manière de gendarme* was so convincing that he frightened her. She retreated a little way up the stairs, as if prepared to obey him, then stopped and started to talk rapidly in an incisive Irish voice. It surprised me that she could be so voluble, having only just awoken. It was nothing to do with her, she said. She was a boarding-house proprietor, not a priest. What people did wasn't her business, so long as they paid their bill and any damage they did and didn't upset the other lodgers. She couldn't go peering into everyone's private affairs. She had to take what people said. If they had given their names as man and wife how was she to know that they were anything else?

And much more on the same theme. Seeing how little she had any reason to know, I thought vaguely that her remarks were not relevant to our intrusion. David cut her short.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said. "We have important news for Mr. Lander. Will you please fetch him at once?"

"You can fetch him yourself," she said. "He's the first door on the second landing." She began to climb heavily up the stairs. "And mind he locks up when you're gone."

She disappeared where the stairs turned, and we heard her shuffling up the next flight, still mumbling to herself, up another flight and still another, the noise growing fainter. Then a door slammed, and the last flicker of light that came down through the well from her candle was eclipsed.

David struck a match, shielded the flame, and lit a gas jet. I shut the street door and he, taking possession as was his custom in a strange place, opened the first door he saw and went into the

dining-room. He lit the gas and we looked round. It was a fairly large room, suffocated with a long table in the centre, a huge side-board, and every conceivable ornament on walls and mantelpiece. The curtains were drawn, and in the grate there were still the faintly glowing remains of a fire. David walked to the window and sat down on the hard sofa.

"I suggest that you go up and get your brother down here—if you can," he said. "I can't very well go myself."

"Of course not," I agreed.

"Here, you'll want these," he called after me as I started to go. He threw a box of matches and I caught it. "Oh, look here," he added, "would you rather I waited for you outside? I don't want to butt in to a private affair."

"No, be a good chap and stay," I begged. "I'll want your support."

"All right."

The gas jet in the hall lighted me as far as the first, and a single match took me to the second landing. It had burned to my fingers and I dropped it just as I reached the door. I stood in the darkness listening, hoping that Charles's familiar snore would tell me that I was outside the right room. But there was no sound. I lifted my hand, which was trembling sensibly, and softly knocked. Immediately my brother's voice said: "Who's that?"

"It's me—John," I answered, my voice hardly above a whisper.

I heard whispers and then a shuffling inside. I drew back a little way from the door, which in a few moments opened. Charles—I could just see the outline of his body—whispered: "What the hell do you want?"

"I want to talk to you," I said; "do come downstairs, just for a minute or two."

He went back into the bedroom, and there were more whispers. I heard: "I won't be long, darling," and then he came out and closed the door quietly behind him. I struck another match and he followed me downstairs.

"This is David Holmes," I said, as I led the way into the dining-room. "You know who he is."

Charles nodded, and turned to me.

"What do you mean by following me up here?" he asked, quite quietly.

I had to make a great effort to collect myself. I seemed to have come through a sleepless night into a new, dark day; my mind would only work in a simple fashion, and when this question suddenly faced me I could no longer think why I had come at all. Charles

had gone off on a foolish escapade; that was still clear; but his foolish escapades had never before been any concern of mine. "You're an ass to get rusticated," had been the limit of my criticism. Now I was deliberately interfering in what was plainly his business, and for the first time I felt that he was older than I.

"Father's very upset," I began weakly. "I left him practically unconscious. You didn't give him a proper chance. If you'd told him absolutely finally that you must marry Hedwig he'd have come round to it by degrees and there would have been a proper engagement and when you'd made some money you could have married her."

"I doubt it," he said bitterly.

"And as it is you've messed things up for yourself and everyone else. There'll be a scandal at home that we shan't live down for years. If you did marry Hedwig you couldn't support her for a fortnight, not without drawing on father. You've given yourself no proper test as to whether you're suited. I'm too fond of you to see you making——"

"I say," he broke in, "I don't mind your preaching at me as though you were my grandfather, but do keep off that brotherly-love chat, if you don't mind. That's a bit more than I can stand. What's the object in all this, anyhow?"

I blinked at him, ready to fall asleep even as I spoke.

"Simply that I've come up here to persuade you not to get married like—like this—I mean secretly. If you come home and then——"

Again he cut me short.

"Why do you think we're sleeping together?" he asked curtly.

"Why? What do you mean? I——"

"I mean, you seem to have some strange ideas about my wife. We were married this afternoon."

He spoke furiously, but in a moment his anger changed into a grim little smile. Leaning back against the sideboard, he regarded me with quiet triumph. I did not know what to say next. There was nothing more worth saying. I could hardly smile and offer my congratulations. I only wanted to go back to my hotel and get to bed, and had I been alone I think I should have done so.

Then David said: "No, you're not married."

I had forgotten that he was in the room. We both turned towards him.

"What do you mean?" Charles asked. "I've got a certificate, if you care to see it."

"I'm sorry," David answered, "but the certificate's worth nothing,

not even the half-guinea you paid for it. I suppose it was half a guinea?"

"Yes."

"That is the usual fee, and I don't suppose he gave you a receipt. Where was it?"

"You mean, where was I married?"

"I mean, where did some rogue pretend to marry you according to Scots law? It's a trade that's still carried on in Renfrewshire villages. I happen to know something about it, since my——"

"Are you trying to make out that the marriage was not legal?"

"It's not a case of trying to make out. By no Scots law could you possibly have been married a few hours after arriving in this country."

I had heard no sound in the passage outside, but the door moved open slowly and Hedwig came in. She had a heavy winter coat over her long nightgown, buttoned up at the throat. Her feet were bare. She had arranged her hair, not elaborately, but in decent order. Her face was very pale, her eyes moist, not sleepy. She stood just inside the door and turned to me.

"Why have you come here, John?" she asked.

It was the second time I had been made to answer that question and again I was at a loss. I said, stumbling and consciously sententious, "You are too much in love with my brother to realize—to realize what a runaway marriage means. The unhappiness that comes——" But I saw that "runaway" had puzzled her, and having no synonym ready I could not go on with my speech.

She answered with pathetic dignity. "Your brother and I are married. There is nothing for you to say."

I saw that Charles was preparing to say something, and that his determination was failing each time his quivering mouth framed an opening word. He looked at me, expecting me to do it for him, and I found that I was dumb like himself. It was David—God bless him!—who spoke.

"Shall I explain?"

Charles nodded. It was only the slightest movement of his head, but I thought I saw in his eyes a flicker of gratitude.

"Miss von Schlingen," David said (startling me because I did not remember telling him her name), "I am a stranger to you and this is no affair of mine. I shall never speak of it. But I have just had to tell you—to tell Mr. Saggard that a wicked trick has been played upon him. The law of marriage in this country is not so simple as people suppose——"

He spoke, not with the deliberate emphasis that we use for foreigners, but quite slowly and with his clear Scots diction. He had got only so far when she understood his meaning. Charles drew her to him and I heard him say something about "fixing up—within a few days——" but her self-control had been overwhelmed by the gentle assault and I do not think she heard him. She moved sideways to a chair, sat down and turned her head away from us, so that only the movement of her shoulders told us that she was crying. David and I went out into the hall.

David would have gone away then, but I felt that the help of a stranger—no ordinary stranger—might still serve to make things easier for three people so intimately related, and when he saw my eagerness he agreed to stay. It was for myself that I needed him most, for I knew less how to act than I had known an hour before. All the reasoning that had brought me on this errand seemed now to have no substance. It was plain to me, at that moment, that instead of supporting an old man's sensible notions I should have left strong and lawless instinct to fashion my brother's history as the history of nations is fashioned; have left the lovers to find for themselves the truth about a cottage ceremony and to escape from it as best they could. I forgot that every circumstance of the wretched affair had taken me by surprise, and I only cursed myself for not foreseeing this moment, myself and David sitting side by side, dumb and shivering, in the dim hall, the door with the slit of light showing beneath, Charles and Hedwig on the other side, stupefied by the revelation that their simple plan had come all to nothing, frightened by a sense of wrongdoing; for we gave the word "sin" a capital in those different days.

I whispered to David, a solution coming to me: "I think it would be better for us both to go. I can tell father that I couldn't find them. They must get married and get on as best they can—I shouldn't have interfered."

But the door opened before David could reply and Hedwig came out, holding herself very upright, Charles following her. I only allowed myself one glance at her face, but it told me something of what her thoughts had been while we sat with the door dividing us. I say that her face told me—certainly I thought so then, and now, when I am less confident than young men are in their power to read a woman's emotions, I still think that I guessed aright what that struggle had been, fought with a few words only, between herself and herself with Charles.

She said, with her lips almost steady: "Charles has told me that your father is very sick."

I replied: "Yes. He has had a shock."

"Charles then must go to him," she said, almost precisely in her effort to save herself from faltering. "You can find two rooms for us at your father's hotel, yes?"

We travelled home the next day. I had thought that a second day's travelling would be too much for my father, but he told me in a way that left no room for argument that he had instructed the hotel porter to get tickets and to look up the best train. That was when I visited him in his room after breakfast, which he had taken in bed; he had been asleep when I went in earlier and I had left a note on the bed-table to tell him that Charles and Hedwig were back. He said "Good morning" when he saw me, and "I got your note, thank you, John." Nothing more, no questions. He had evidently slept well, and breakfasted not too badly, for there was only one piece of toast left and I noticed two eggshells. He was still tired, and a little confused, but he got out of bed with purposeful alertness and refused my offer to help him with his dressing. That rapid return of his forces, though it was normal to his physique and temperament, did much to renew my childhood's awe of him; and I feared for Charles.

To Charles, however, he said nothing except a "good morning," and he treated Hedwig with the same brief courtesy. In the course of the day he spoke to one or other at intervals, requesting Charles to pull up the window, inquiring of Hedwig whether she preferred to travel with her face towards the locomotive. To me he remarked that the carriage was dirty, and that in his opinion the country south of the border showed the more charming scenery. For the rest he read in a life of Bishop Thorne I had bought for him, and seemed as little aware of us as the stout matron who sat opposite him. Charles and I talked from time to time in low but ostentatiously casual tones about remote trivialities. Hedwig hardly spoke at all, but she nodded gravely when Charles or I asked her a nervous little question about her comfort, and she even smiled once, with her ordinary, gentle smile. I think that the warm sunlight which came into the carriage did much to throw into unreality the drama that had opened by the light of a gas lamp in a shoddy eating-room and gone forward with all the poignancy of dark deserted streets as its stage. I myself thought that life would go on now as it had gone before. The experience would be enough, I argued, to prevent Charles and Hedwig from another rash move. It would be unlike my father to think that punishment was due. Things would settle down gradually and in the end, I vaguely supposed, the two would be married in the proper way. I still held the opinion that after so tempestuous a proof of

their attachment no one could be so lacking in all sense and in all morality as to forbid their union.

Charles—I could see from the misery in his face—held no such rosy view.

For the last part of the journey the four of us were alone in the carriage, and when my father went along to the lavatory I followed him into the corridor, closing the door behind me. It was thus that Charles had five minutes alone with his beloved, and though I do not know what he said to her I can guess the vows he made, his words of comfort, the promises that if they were separated he would move the whole world to get back to her again. I was glad to have given them that five minutes, for at their parting they had had no chance for any but a brief farewell.

We were met by my mother at Peterborough—my father must have telegraphed to her from Glasgow—and the affair was managed so quickly it was all over before I realized what was happening. My father left us all standing on the platform while he went away—to make some arrangements, he said. Just before the train started again for London, my mother entered the carriage we had left, gently urging Hedwig in front of her. Charles was too astonished to understand. Only when the train moved he ran forward, jumped up to the window, caught Hedwig's head with one arm and kissed her. A porter ran after him shouting and pulled him away. He stood with the porter's hands still on his shoulders, crying like a child, until the train was out of sight.

There, as far as I could see, the story was ended. For the week that followed, until he was sent off to Cornwall, I had Charles's wretchedness to remind me of what had become past history. (I told him, with a great effort, that I was sorry about what I had done. He only said: "Oh, all right.") In my imagination I saw the scene which Klaus has told me he dreams sometimes, the Antwerp steamer moving slowly away from Parkeston Quay, the shuffling and tumult on deck, the cold wind coming in from the sea to make the girl shiver as she leans against the rail and watches Charles's country receding. I could hear the sailor saying—or is it only now that I hear him?—"Stormy? why, on this crossing it's alway; stormy." Perhaps I saw too, faintly, the bustle at Antwerp and the long train journey, the days of emptiness that were to follow—over there as in Cornwall—and the ugly wound closing slowly—ah, God! how slowly!—until nothing was left but the thin scar, hidden but life-lasting. That was all I saw. I did not know that love is a hungry power and that for all it gives it must be paid richly in its own dreadful currency; that not only the ache of separation, but a physical agony and another creature to be enticed

are the reward it claims when it has given full measure. Deep in the fertile soil, beneath the trees which had all been stripped by the gale, the seed lay ready. But I remembered that my holiday would soon be over, and as I went down to the stables to saddle Grey Lady, the morning sun facing me, a breeze brought the smell of cut grass from the terrace lawn where Cragg had been working. The smell was sweet and reassuring. Grey Lady called a greeting to me as I coaxed the key into the rusty padlock.

The Baroness von Schlingen guessed in less than a week—four months at least before a man would have guessed, two months before a woman, long enough before most other mothers. Something told her, told her certainly, that love left forlorn could not alone account for all the phenomena. She asked no questions. What was the use, Hedwig being so young and so carefully brought up? As for the details of the offence, the circumstances might have been this or that, it did not much matter. And assuredly she would not sacrifice her dignity by making inquiries at the source. She had finished with that lot. She only wanted never to hear about them again. Fool that she had been ever to let Hedwig go to them, knowing as she did that the English had no sense of morality or decency or honour. In law, of course—no, never! never on any account!

Naturally the knowledge did not come at once. It was first an uneasiness, then a suspicion, then a probability ripening into certainty; and coming by these stages, the truth only made her angry, not shocked and bewildered. Indeed, it was doubtful whether the Baroness was ever bewildered—a poor man's daughter, a natural scholar, a widow fifteen years. Before the suspicion had become a certainty she had started to make her plans. Bold plans, for so precarious a situation must be managed boldly. It was no good clenching one's hands in fury. Action—she must act!

There was still, *Gott sei dank*, the little money which Friedrich had left, lying in the bank untouched. Probably that would just be enough for the expenses—she had hoped to save it against other accidents, but that could not be helped. It was fortunate that the young officer was at this moment stationed so far away. Fortunate, too, that he was so old a friend of the family—there could be nothing unusual in going so far to pay him a visit. Best of all, he was devoted to Hedwig; he had told the Baroness that much himself—his frankness with her was one of the youth's most charming characteristics. She had been amiable then, not very encouraging; second son of a second son, not really up to the level of her ambitions. She would talk to him

again now, a frank, jolly talk with a little seriousness when she had made him friendly. It was the *Leisedich* cigars, was it not, which he liked so much?

Hedwig, no doubt, would be glad enough of another change if it were represented in the most alluring terms; terms with a dash of the medical in them, convalescence after a breakdown, that sort of thing; it was always best to pretend that mental ills were physical and vice versa. The rest would not be so easy. Things must be carefully carried out and still more carefully reported. If the young man were not ordered off to some remote part of the country—even that might be arranged if one made oneself very charming to the Kommandant—there would have to be a long honeymoon. He had, after all, a little money, though not too much. Then there could be a certain ambiguity about dates, the event could be announced as due early in the autumn (“such a passionate couple”) and when the news came through its prematurity could give amazement and anxiety to the happy grandmother. Please God the little thing would get its looks from Hedwig!

Already the Baroness was composing in her mind many letters, every one nicely calculated to make the play run smoothly. Hedwig sat opposite, white and silent, picking at her food like a fastidious child. The plan must be broached quickly, the Baroness thought, but not just at this moment. In the evening she would make coffee, herself, in the way that Hedwig liked it. Then, if Hedwig could be persuaded not to go to bed, she would play on the piano a little. After that, perhaps——

II

KLAUS was dimly aware that in a past life he had already solved all the problems about this man. He would not have talked about solving problems, for he was as yet inexperienced at conscious and reflective cogitation, and indeed he tackled the mysteries that he found in life more by gradual self-adaptation than by intellectual attack. The faint memory of another existence could not be trusted—it lay in a field of unreality—and it was only by cautious approach that he arrived for the second time at his conclusion, that the man identified as Vati, despite his strange appearance and actions, was completely harmless.

Not to be encouraged too far, not yet; but an appreciative movement of the lips from time to time would involve Klaus in no obligations, since there was always the other thing if Vati became presumptuous. Vati could do what he liked for that matter, so long as Mutti was present. Mutti was of the type that stood on a wide base, as opposed to the scaffolding that supported Vati and less trustworthy specimens of the same kind, and she had the round top that went with wide bases, infinitely more satisfactory than the square top of the scaffolding people. She was not only wide-based, she was something special and distinct. She knew far more than anyone else about all the things that were really important. She had tact. A nuisance at times, awkward and obstinate, but, as far as a person could be in a world of very dense people, she was reliable; and there was something else about her that couldn't be grasped all at once, a feeling she gave you that her efficiency and the softness of her were more important than anything else—except, perhaps, food and drink. There were more entertaining people—Vati, for instance, one would laugh outright at his oddness were it not indecorous—but it was Mutti who counted.

Klaus lay awake and watched the green thing that moved backwards and forwards outside the window. Occasionally a red thing, a great long lump of a thing, went by very quickly, sometimes in one direction, sometimes the other—but the direction mattered little enough to Klaus, as he did not bother to follow things that went past as quickly as that. It was fun enough to hear the warning noise and to see the red blob appear and disappear. Quite close the blobs came, but they couldn't get dangerously near owing to the window. That piece of knowledge

had come to him quite easily, for the blobs had been appearing since the time when he had not troubled at all about such remote phenomena.

It was his custom when he woke up to summon Mutti, but to-day he felt very comfortable and there was such a wealth of amusement handy, the green thing and the red blobs, that he could do without Mutti for a bit. He had, moreover, certain business to attend to. There was this question of the movement at the end of the cot. He had started investigations yesterday, but progress was slow; the only way to get a matter of this sort right was to observe closely and repeatedly, and the things outside the window made concentration very difficult. He was fairly certain, but not quite, that he had established constant sequence. He would try again now.

The noise came, louder and louder, then the red blob, there for a moment and gone again. There, that had mixed it all up! Klaus forgot, for half a minute or more, that he was really trying to work something out. For an instant he had the idea of trying to find some relation between foot and blob, but this he dismissed at once. Research carried over so wide a territory was bound to be fruitless for a student in the pupil stage. Abandoning mental exertion he lay, still and content, for a few moments. Then he jerked his foot again, and up came the little hill at the end of the cot. Very satisfactory. He did it again.

He was so absorbed that he failed to hear the door gently opening and someone coming with the tread of a mouse towards the cot. The steps had come quite close when he suddenly heard them. Ah, Mutti! Unfortunate, in a way, that she had come to disturb him just when everything was so interesting; and as it couldn't be a meal time—tummy pronounced clearly on that point—she probably only wanted to show him the boring round thing. (He wouldn't show any interest in that.) Still, it was a great thing that she should be regular.

At once he realized intuitively that something was wrong. Intuitively—well, perhaps it was something in the sound, perhaps something in the smell. To make distinctions rapidly was a strong point with Klaus. He wriggled his body, hampered by the clothes tightly tucked in, and got on to one side. Then he saw a head appearing over the top of the curtain. Horrors! A square head—Vati's.

He thought at first that the best way of dealing with the intrusion was to ignore it, and he plunged his face into the pillow. Vati would think he had gone off to sleep, but really he was listening. Vati did not go away. The presumptuous man stood there looking over down

the side of the cot—Klaus could feel him. At least, he was almost sure he could feel him. To make quite certain he cautiously raised and turned his head. Yes, there he was. Well, a good stare would probably be enough to chastise his effrontery. Klaus stared. Vati stared back for a moment or two, irresolute, then he put out his hand to unfasten the catch on the side of the cot.

Klaus saw that things must be taken in hand, and he lost no time. He gave his preliminary wail, paused, drew in all the breath he could, folded his face into the right position, his mouth stretched to the full limits, and bellowed. An ordinary, low note bellow to begin with, then a bellow with a scream in it, then another one midway between the two. There! He looked up. Vati had vanished.

The success was complete, and he broke off at once, hardly troubling to put an artistic finish to the rout with the customary diminuendo of wails subsiding into sniffs. But a moment later he decided that as everything in life had become so uncertain he had better summon Mutti. It was inevitable, now, that she would show him the round thing, but even that was better than a state of things in which Vati came peering about without being under proper control. Yes, to get Mutti was the sound course. He hastily prepared a little store of wails—not his strongest type, but thinnish ones with carrying power—and released them in succession. At first there was no response and he was obliged to use more power. Then the door opened and there—again—was Vati.

* * * * *

Vati decided on the bold course. His instructions were to rouse Klaus at four o'clock and play with him until five. At four, precisely, he had proceeded to carry out the first order—he was a soldier, and all his actions were performed with a certain finish—and the rousing could be said to have been accomplished. He had debated the wisdom of acting on the second order; Klaus, after all, had hardly been given time enough to get to know him again after his long absence. But he was not accustomed to evade defined duties and he now realized that his only chance of not appearing utterly contemptible in the eyes of his wife was to carry out a surprise attack. He might astonish Klaus into submission and complaisance.

This time he did not hesitate outside the door. He turned the handle sharply, swung the door open, advanced firmly across the room and let down the side of the cot.

For a moment he thought that his tactics had been successful. Klaus stopped wailing and gazed at him dumbfounded. Taking advantage of the position Vati grasped him by the waist, threw him

lightly over his shoulder, hooked his arm over the child's legs, and strode to the door. He was half-way across the landing before Klaus recovered, then a vibration gave him warning. A moment's pause, and Klaus roared.

Nothing daunted, Vati marched downstairs. Klaus, finding vocal protest insufficient, reinforced his arguments by kicking and bouncing. Vati paid no attention except to grip the legs a little tighter. In the hall he met Berta coming out of the kitchen.

"Poor little mite! let me take him," she begged.

"Thank you, Berta, I can manage him perfectly."

He went into the nursery, shut the door behind him with his foot and carefully lowered Klaus to the floor. Klaus lay on his back and screamed with redoubled energy. "If the English are not a quick-blooded race, where did he get it?" Vati wondered. Having found and lighted a cigar, he stood a few feet away and speculatively surveyed his son.

After two minutes Klaus, remembering vaguely that phenomena of some interest were attached to the smell that now came to him, stopped yelling and laboriously rolled himself into a sitting posture. With an expression of supreme distaste he regarded Vati. Vati met his gaze calmly. Not so bad, he thought, and he chuckled as he heard Berta slithering away from the door outside. It only required a little firmness. He pulled at the cigar until his mouth was quite full and then blew out the smoke in five beautiful, heavy rings. Klaus's expression gradually changed. The wrinkles of disgust which at first he had sedulously maintained slipped away, leaving the surface so smooth that the wrinkles hardly seemed possible. His face was now inert and rather stupid, as the face of a cow is stupid, his mouth slightly agape. Presently a hint of a smile came to his mouth and his eyes answered. A moment later two spots of dampness on his cheeks were the only sign of the emotional storm that had passed. Vati blew five more rings, not quite such good ones. Klaus chuckled.

Complete as his triumph was, Vati was not satisfied. The present entertainment would in time lose its savour, he argued; Klaus's contentment could hardly last till five o'clock on the strength of one turn alone; better to bring on a fresh act now, and repeat the present success a minute or two before the fatal moment when Mutti was due to arrive. He put out the cigar—he hated putting out a cigar—and sat down on the floor. The smile vanished from Klaus's face.

"Just one moment, old chap!"

He stretched his long arm for Katzi, who lay with his legs in the air a few feet away.

"Look, Klaus, look at Katzi!"

Grasping him by the hind-quarters, he pushed Katzi forward, jerking him so that his loose head nodded up and down, then to right and left. Klaus surveyed Katzi, and at the sight of his eye, which hung down an inch from his face on its thread, grinned feebly.

"Say good morning!" Vati commanded, addressing Katzi.

Stretching forward his thumb and forefinger he sharply squeezed Katzi's belly. Katzi chirruped obligingly. Klaus, without any hesitation, roared.

Vati threw the creature into a corner, leapt to his feet, took hold of the cigar and relighted it. Klaus stopped roaring for an instant. Out came the rings again, one, two, three—Klaus uttered a bitter cry and looked away.

"Look, Klaus! look at the beautiful rings. Watch Vati blow one ring through the other!"

It was no good. Klaus refused even to glance at the rings which were rolling away one after the other and dissolving into the blue mist that hung below the ceiling. He was settling down for a long, steady mourning for all the good things of life that had passed away. Wail after wail came in orderly succession, just as the rings had done. Vati was distraught. He ran round the room, picking up every object he saw. He dived into the cupboard and pulled out the golliwog, the seal with the tiger's head, the armless china doll, the motor-car. Stooping, he arranged all these treasures in three-quarters of a circle round their owner. Answering move to move, Klaus twisted round to face the only gap in the circumference and his howls continued relentlessly.

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At last Vati had an idea. Mutti had warned him that if Klaus were at all restless it meant that he wanted something. Where was it? He looked round wildly and then remembered that he had seen it in the night-nursery. Having glanced to see that the guard was against the fire he crept to the door as cautiously as if Klaus would have heard his ordinary footsteps and stole out. He locked the door behind him and put the key in his pocket (in case Berta should go in and upset the child), dashed upstairs, seized the vessel, and tore back to the nursery. As he stopped to unlock the door he became aware, to his astonishment, that the noise had stopped. Inside he found Klaus sitting upright with his head bent forward, his expression grave and critical, trying to fit together the two pieces of a match he had broken in half. Klaus looked up, said with his eye that he was busy, and went on with his work.

Vati sat down and for a few moments did nothing. Then he

asked cautiously: "I say, Klaus, do you by any chance——?" and he revealed the vessel.

Klaus raised his head to examine the vessel, and at once made facial preparations for a bout of distress.

"All right, old chap, all right!"

Vati pitched the vessel into the open cupboard and Klaus instantly recovered.

Thereafter the two sat silent; the child intent upon the match-stick, the man quietly watching the child. If only this could last till five, he thought. Very cautiously he stretched out his hand, found the cigar and for the third time lighted it. He puffed steadily, and the minute hand of his watch moved round slowly. Klaus took no notice of the smoke curling upwards, and he was still absorbed in his occupation when the cigar was finished. But a minute later he dropped the pieces and looked up. Again Vati glanced anxiously at his watch. Eleven minutes to five. He smiled shyly at Klaus, and Klaus smiled in response. Slowly he bent forward, lowered his long body on to his knees, and then sat, still smiling, with his legs astride Klaus's body. With infinite caution he stretched out his arms and brought his hands in to the child's sides.

"Friendly now?" he asked.

Klaus thought for a moment and then smiled again.

"Come to Vati?"

With a little jerk he lifted Klaus into the air, lay back on the ground, and lowered him on to his chest. For a moment Klaus was surprised, slightly nettled. Then his smile broke out once more. He poked his hand forward and tugged cautiously at Vati's moustache, drew his hand away sharply, laughed, and tugged again. The new game proceeded merrily.

"Klaus, old man," Vati said, when his moustache was freed for a moment and Klaus sat chuckling, "Klaus, do you care for Vati at all?"

Klaus grinned.

"Would you like him any more if he were your real Vati?"

"Kggk," said Klaus, and pulled the moustache again.

"Klaus, Liebling, tell me just one thing." His voice fell to a whisper. "Do you think *she'd* love me more still if I were your real Vati?"

Klaus considered the matter thoughtfully, but he would offer no opinion. He suggested that the game should be continued.

"You think she couldn't?" Vati's whisper sank lower and lower. "But you know, Klaus, I think she could, just a little bit."

With a sudden movement he pulled the child's face down close to

his and kissed him on the cheek. Klaus did not mind. He thought Vati was very amusing. He laughed loudly and asked to be kissed again.

In another moment his interest was diverted and he turned round sharply to utter a little scream of pleasure. It was Mutti standing in the doorway. She ran forward, caught hold of Klaus, lifted him high into the air and hugged him. "*Mein Klauschen!*" she cried, kissing him all over his face, and with little unpractised clickings of his lips he returned her kisses. Vati, standing a yard away, watched them.

III

HEINRICH GOTTHOLD was shot on the sixteenth of April. I am certain of the date because there is a note in my diary. The page is covered all over with figures, little sums and diagrams, and on one side underneath the figures a list of memos—"Write Lanair. Gaines expected 1530. Report lack of 34's unless consignment in. Taming Turtle." I can remember nothing of what these entries meant, least of all "Taming Turtle," which perhaps I have misread, as the writing is small and smudged. At the bottom, in indelible pencil, are the words "adieu Heinrich." I am not sure why I reported the incident thus, or whether the words were written on the same day, but I vaguely remember writing them, the action being connected in my mind with the discomfort I felt from a boil on my neck.

The name of the village has gone from me altogether. I think it was a long name, compounded of E's, U's and L's in juxtaposition, of the sort that is difficult to the English tongue. I see it as a village of one straight street, all the houses except two (in one of which I was quartered) below the bourgeois mark, the majority peasant cottages ridiculously cramped together. Here and there a house was missing, all but a rubbish heap of brick with a little fireplace still standing, part of a truckle-bed lolling over a wrecked table, tins and window-catches and broken chamber-pots heaped in profusion amidst the dust and rubble. At one end of the street, where it widened a little, a line of half a dozen trees stood in front of the houses, with the stumps of a few more. These trees continued with many gaps, right along the road on both sides. The village was on a slight rise, and standing in the middle of the road opposite what had been the baker's cottage you could see three or four kilometres of road in each direction. I should recognize the place if I saw it again, but I do not wish to find it. With all allowance for the British soldier's initiative and ingenuity I cannot believe that pigs were kept near my quarters when I was there. But it is when I smell the horrible odour of pigsties, dear to the country-bred town-dweller, that the image of that village rises in my mind.

It was done in an orchard about half a mile away from the village. I gave Jenkinson the job as he was the most thick-skinned of my boys and I did not intend to be worried by the business myself

after I had given the necessary orders. I had, after all, done my share. It was I who had first been suspicious about Heinrich's credentials, had the investigations made, and marked him down. All the subsequent proceedings had been under my direction, despite my protests—expressed as vigorously as the conventional form of military communications would allow—that to control the movements of several hundred men over a wide area was ample occupation for one person and that extraneous affairs might well be attended to elsewhere. My lords and masters would be obliged if I would see that the necessary arrangements were made; and having issued my instructions I returned to the two chief subjects which were then engaging my attention, to wit: the complete breakdown of arrangements for the supply of food and equipment to the Redonnay area, and the loss of a gold cigarette case, the property of General N——, alleged to have been dispatched by special orderly from Gallon-les-bœufs on the 28th ultimo. As far as I was concerned the Gotthold papers were filed. When Jenkinson said smartly: "I quite understand, sir!" and left me I had no thought of writing sentimentally "adieu Heinrich" in my diary; though I had regarded the man with some affection.

On the previous evening I returned late after a wearisome day during which I had bumped for miles over abominable tracks, argued with incompetent transport officers, and sprinkled hell-fire over men who were too tired even to realize that I was giving them orders. I was conscious as my car heaved and lurched its way homewards that the situation at Redonnay would for days to come be just as bad as if I had sat in my room all day and read the little volume of Balzac which the Curé (Heaven pardon him for my sake—it is a lovely edition) had bequeathed to me. I arrived to find Bennet raging. Something had unaccountably fallen out of the sky and completely wrecked the little outhouse which he had so ingeniously turned into a bathroom; he could not make out where the thing had come from, but he shrewdly suspected that it was from our side; it had also more or less wrecked the only man on the place who knew how long to leave an egg in the saucepan. He talked about the loss of his bathroom all the time I was eating my supper, the tale of his woes interspersed with heavy sarcasms upon the British artillery units, and would have gone on till midnight had I not told him that I thought there was something wrong with my car's radiator and thereby sent him off to follow his own particular pleasures. I lit my pipe, got out my maps and papers, and worked solidly till about half-past eleven, when Bennet returned. He could find nothing wrong with the radiator; had I by any chance been thinking of the petrol-tank at

the rear? Oh, and he had found in the stable a book about Napoleon, with a letter written by the emperor himself giving a straight tip on how to win a war. Did I think it would be a good idea if he wrote to G.H.Q. and put them on to this? I said that if he was in a writing mood there was any amount of work to be done on the TX 507 file. He replied that having been on the TX 507 since ten double-o hours that morning he could no longer remember the difference between a Mark-6 rifle and a soldier's drinking flask. I told him to go to bed.

I took the huge bundle of correspondence relating to the cigarette-case, re-read the two letters on top and then pitched it back into the Curé's wardrobe. I uncovered the typewriter and began to knock out the first part of my report. There were eight parts to get through. I could have summoned young Hale to do some of the typing, but he had been out all day and his mistakes would waste more time than his help saved. Towards two o'clock I became brilliant and the fourth and fifth parts, both long ones, were finished in record time. I felt that had I wished I could have composed them in blank or even in rhyming verse. My brain was clearer than it had been since the beginning of the war; I knew exactly how to clear up the Redon-nay trouble, and had some inkling as to the whereabouts of the cigarette-case. The seventh part seemed to go equally well, but on reading it over I found that I had left out the two most important pieces of information. Words, and in some places whole sentences, had unaccountably been written twice over. My brain at this discovery seemed to bend and collapse. Painfully I retyped the whole part, and even working from my corrections on the first script I constantly made mistakes. I read over twice more—the consequences of a mistake might be far-reaching—and even then I did not feel confident that I had left nothing ridiculous, no unfinished sentences or items of information repeated. The last part took me exactly an hour and a half.

My fire was still going when I finished and I put on a kettle. I was conscious that there were several little things that I should have done, but I could not think what they were. I wandered round the room, putting some papers in a drawer, winding the clock, bothering over the untidiness of everything. The orderlies had instructions not to move papers and I was therefore responsible for tidiness myself. Wherever I looked I saw something that would be lost if it were not put away and I began to shuffle hither and thither as fussily as an old hen. The kettle boiled and I made myself a cup of cocoa—I always slept better with cocoa inside—and started to shave. (As a rule I found it much easier to shave before going to

bed than on rising.) While I was lathering I began to wonder where a certain transfer certificate had got to. I should have to send it off the next day, and I could not remember where I had put it. It had been signed, I knew; or rather I knew to begin with; but as I sat mechanically drawing the brush backwards and forwards across my chin I felt less certain that I had signed the chit and gradually I began to doubt whether I had seen it at all. Urged chiefly by a foolish curiosity I went and opened the drawer where I would most probably have put it. I rummaged through the papers. It was not there. Anxious now, I unlocked drawer after drawer and searched feverishly, with no result. I began to tour the room, picking up maps and plates and looking underneath them, putting them down and picking them up again to make sure. The certificate was not important, but I felt that I could not sleep until I had found it. Returning at last to my working-table I saw that the item "sign and return T.C." on the previous day's list of memoranda had been ticked. The moment my eye caught this I remembered quite clearly signing the certificate and telling Hale to send it off. I even remembered a very feeble joke I had made at the time.

The soap was dry on my face, but the water was still warm enough and I lathered again. I fitted my razor together, propped up the mirror to catch the light as well as possible, and began to scrape diligently. It was, perhaps, five minutes later that I found myself lying on the floor, the razor a few feet from my eye with the blade upturned. I picked myself up, wiped off the rest of the soap—Donald would have to shave me in the morning—took off my watch and wound it up. Half-past five, I noticed. Surely not! No, I was holding it the wrong way up. Eleven o'clock. It could not be as early as that. It dawned on me at last that the watch must have stopped some hours before I had wound it. I put out the lamp and stumbled off to bed.

The cocoa, it seemed, had not had its usual effect (actually I found it in the morning untouched) for I could not get to sleep. I lay still, acutely conscious of a dozen physical discomforts but too inert to make any attempt at putting them right. I could not even find will enough to rearrange my pillow. And while still awake I dreamed horribly about Lanair, who told me that they were going to hang him for adultery and about a book I had lost which I chased feverishly through an ominously silent country, unable to run fast enough because of the blankets lying heavily on my legs. I was not aware of having lost consciousness when I opened my eyes and saw Tanner standing beside my bed with a lighted candle.

He said: "Excuse me, sir, I oughtn't to trouble you, sir, but the prisoner would like to have a word with you, if you would be so good, sir."

I opened my eyes a little wider and stared at him.

He repeated: "The prisoner asked if he might have a word with you, sir."

He said this three or four times, and at last I turned over and raised my head.

I said: "The prisoner? You mean Captain Lanair?"

"No, sir, the prisoner Gotole, sir."

"Gotole?"

"Yes, sir. He asked if he could speak to you. I told him I'd ask you, sir."

"Gotole?"

"Yes, sir."

I could not make out what he wanted, but I said "All right!" and closed my eyes.

"Will you see him, sir?" Tanner asked again.

I looked up and saw that he had produced—like a conjurer—a cup of tea.

"Yes," I said. "Yes, I'll see him."

I did not in the least know whom he wanted me to see, but Tanner could be trusted not to bother me with anything unimportant. "I'll be down in a minute," I told him, and he put the cup down on a chair and left me.

I closed my eyes, dozed for a few seconds, and then got out of bed. I put on my boots, a scarf and my jacket, and went downstairs. It surprised me that all these actions cost me so little effort—indeed, no effort at all. Downstairs all was dark and I could not find Tanner, so it was impossible to do what he had asked me. The door leading out into the courtyard had been filled in with bricks, and there were other doors which I had not known before. It was puzzling, but my movements were all made so easily that I had no desire to go back to my room. At last I heard Tanner's voice, and when he gently shook my arm I found that I was still in bed.

With the tenderness of a sick-nurse he pulled back the blankets and lifted me to my feet. It came back to me while he was helping me on with my greatcoat—Gotole, of course he meant Gotthold, Heinrich Gotthold. In private I had called him Heinrich, for he was a man whom one called easily by his first name and with his rare shrewdness he had adopted no alias. (American, he had said, of a German family, but wedded by the sentiment of common tongue to the cause of England. His father, yes, he had still spoken lovingly

of the country of the Rhine; but Heinrich, he was American right through, British if George III had been a little more diplomatic. Came over on the *Lusitania*, yes, landed at Plymouth, yes, and he would like some time to show you photos of his place in Cincinnati.) Of course, it was Heinrich that Tanner meant. Heinrich would have come in late, after I had gone to bed, and there was something he wanted to tell me. Perhaps there was something wrong—perhaps the lack of ordinary caution for which I had so often reprimanded him had resulted in his stopping something. Then it dawned on me. There was something more wrong than that. I had told Jenkinson to make an end of Heinrich.

I asked Tanner what the time was, and when he told me I knew that there was less than an hour to go. I wished that Tanner had not been so determined to wake me. Ordinarily I should have trembled at the thought of this interview, have done anything to avoid it, and now, with my brain so viscous that I had actually tried to put my left arm into the right sleeve of my jacket, I did not see how I was to manage it at all. Still, Tanner had been right to rouse me. Something had urged that plain, practical man out of his common sense into a sense nearer to real values. It was right—though how had the worthy Tanner guessed it?—that I should see Heinrich if he so wished; he, within sight of the end of his run, had a claim upon me, since I might live another month, perhaps for years. It wouldn't do to be sentimental; plain foolishness to set value upon any man when men were like brittle china; but if Tanner saw in this occasion some excuse for stepping off the path of routine, it could not be wrong for poor Saggard, who made no claim to Tanner's sublime consistency, to feel that by its outrageous beating his heart had sent up a stream of treacly substance which stifled his throat and paralysed his jaws. I put on my cap and went downstairs.

Tanner followed me along the passage and out into the courtyard, holding a lamp high so that I could see my way. Outside it was still quite dark, but far over towards Quesnoy the colour was already being drawn from the amethyst sky, and I heard a bird singing. We came to the door of the baking-house, where a sentry jumped to attention. Tanner unlocked the door and left me to go in alone.

The lamp standing on the table gave a good light to all but the far corners of the room, and within the circle of its radiance I noticed every detail. My mind, reluctant to perform the task of reasoning, was concentrated upon the business of simple perception. I saw as a child sees, but I remember now more clearly than a child remembers

—the dark patch on the brick floor that was shaped like Australia, the initials I.F.A. crudely cut on the leg of the table, the bottle that held wild flowers. It was those incongruous flowers which made me doubt for a few moments if I were even now awake, and twice while I was in that room I raised my knees sharply to see if I should feel a blanket holding them. The picture before me was very concise, more solid to my senses than the image seen through a stereoscope; but I mistrusted both eye and ear, and my drowsiness seemed to hold a curtain between now and memory which I had barely the strength to see through. I knew that Jenkinson was going to take my friend away and shoot him, and that, I seemed to remember, was wise and sane and just; but as I saw it now it seemed nothing but the monstrous jesting of insanity.

Heinrich got up when I went in.

I said: "Good morning, Heinrich," and he answered "Good morning." I told him to sit down, and he pushed a chair forward so that I could sit close to him. He gave me one of his cigarettes, apologizing that he could not light it for me; his matches had been taken away from him. Had he my permission to smoke himself? I said "Of course," and finding my own matches I lit both cigarettes.

It was Heinrich who began talking. "I am sorry to have asked you to get up so early," he began. "I can see that you are very tired."

He spoke awkwardly, for we had had no private conversation since his arrest, and in those few days we had lost touch with our old comradeship. With my perception strangely quickened, I noticed more than ever before how English his accent was, but for the trace of an American slur, how easy and natural his use of idiom. The action of smoking quickened me, and as my mind began to gain in its struggle against the weight of torpor, I wondered at the man's artistry in transformation, almost to doubting the truth of what we had proved and he at last confessed.

"I would not have asked this favour of you," he said, holding his cigarette away from his mouth and fixing his eyes on it, "only I felt there were things I must say. You know how it is, at the end of their lives men become garrulous, they want to get everything off their chests."

He smiled faintly, and just for an instant he glanced up at me. His eyes fell again to the grey ash which was very slowly lengthening; but he was master of the interview—I let him go on.

"You know, you have all been extraordinarily kind to me. I haven't been able to thank you all. I wonder if you would thank everyone for me for—everything."

With a little gesture, his hand thrown backwards, he showed me what he meant. There were the flowers on the table for one thing. I noticed, too, a cushion which I recognized as one that had been missing for some days from my room—a piece of civilization the loss of which I had vehemently bewailed.

“—and they’ve sent off somewhere to try and get a proper Father for me—I’m a Catholic, you know.”

“Who has?” I asked, knowing that I should have thought of it. “Tanner?”

“Yes.”

Tanner. One of the old school. At it all his life. Aldershot, South Africa, Aldershot, India, Aldershot. So valuable for getting men through in half schedule time that he had had to beg on his knees to get sent out. A way with him, a knack of inculcating spirit as well as knowledge. “See here you, you with the bottom like a pumpkin, you’re just ticklin’ the sack with the end of your bayonet same as if you was tryin’ to make it laugh. What you’ve got to imagine is a great big fat oozy slimy adulteratin’ Jerry in front of you. An’ it’s no good you lettin’ it fall out. You got to jerk it out, like this, ugh! see? The Germans ain’t made of butter.” And he had shown them, too—I had seen it myself—in the dirty little show in the quarry near Mény Bois. Curious that it was Tanner——

My eyes went back to Heinrich, sitting cross-legged, one arm over the back of his chair. He had shaved himself carefully, I noticed—he was always a spruce man—and his brown hair was oiled and neatly parted. He was dressed in grey trousers and a blazer, Bennet’s, I suspected, and probably the only things that could be found to replace his English uniform. He still had his khaki collar and tie. I could see that one of his legs was shaking a little, his body acknowledging what his spirit would not acknowledge, and that he was trying with the other leg to hold it still. I looked at his hands, which were beautifully strong and slender.

“I am sorry about my dress,” he said smiling. “I should have liked to be shot in my colonel’s uniform, but they could not get one through in time.”

I was awake enough to be sensitive now, and I could not bear his gentle gaiety. I had been wrong to let him do the talking just because I could not think what to say myself. “Look here, Heinrich,” I said clumsily. “I’m damned sorry about this.”

“It is how things go,” he replied. “For myself, it is a great relief that the game is over. You enjoy the exercise of your skill,

but you're glad that your opponent is better—because that ends it." He smiled again. "For myself, I mean; for the Fatherland—well, I've been of some service."

We lit fresh cigarettes and sat silent for a while. We had not much time and we were still far away from what mattered to us, but silence would bring it faster than talking.

I asked him at last: "Are you married, Heinrich?"

"Yes. The little wife I told you about, she really exists, only she's not very little and she doesn't live in Cincinnati. Yes, the little boy's real too."

"Is your wife very fond of you?" It was an odd question to ask a man, and I do not know why I asked it.

He said: "Yes—I think so. Yes, she is fond of me, very fond of me."

But I thought I learned more than the words meant from the way he said them, with a selective emphasis on the "fond." He drew hard at his cigarette for a few moments, quickening the red rim into a bright glow. "*Il faut être philosophe*," he said.

He told me some more about his wife—little enough of herself, not even what he called her except "*mein Liebling*"—but something of their relation to each other. He would not have said so much, even to me, had not the end of self-revelation been so close. I was still heavy with sleep, but I understood him. I shall not write down what he said.

He gave me two letters, and I guessed that he had spent most of the night writing one of them, for with all the freshness of his skin his eyes were as tired as my own.

"Perhaps you could read this one out or post it with the orders," he said, handing me the thinner one. "It is just" (a little shrug of the shoulders) "a thank-you—and an apology. The other's for my wife. I don't know if you can get it to her? I've left it open, but I would rather only you saw it."

"I'll get it through if I possibly can," I told him. "I'll do my best."

"It's awfully good of you," he said. He continued: "And if ever you should meet Klaus—it's a small world, you know—you'll give him my love, won't you?"

I did not know whom he meant by Klaus, and I was going to ask him when there was a knock at the door. The sentry put his head inside.

"There's a clergyman's just reported, sir."

"Ask him to wait just two minutes."

Heinrich rose. We both tried to say something and he, who succeeded, made a better job of it than I should have done.

"You do understand, don't you, that it's not personal. It's never been personal, at all. You see how I mean. Next time, perhaps"—but there he stopped.

I could only repeat his words. "No, it's never been personal." Then I said: "Good-bye, Heinrich."

He held my hand for a moment and murmured: "Good-bye, Gott sei mit Dir."

The priest was waiting just outside, a corpulent Frenchman who had come over ten miles on his bicycle. (I don't know how Tanner had found him.) I told him that the prisoner was ready and he went in. The light had crept forward some distance, and though a drizzle of rain had started the freshness of the air tempted me to take a walk. I went through the house and out into the street the other side. The street was deserted as I started to walk slowly to where the church had been, but I was soon overtaken by lorries hurrying to get through to Galoûme before full daylight. At least twenty passed, at regular intervals, shaking the old village so that bricks fell down from the broken walls. Someone far off must have seen them, for less than half a mile away a shell burst in the fields—a tactful warning that they must get away more quickly to-morrow. I stopped, expecting to see another, but there were no more. The rain was increasing and it was rather cold, so I turned and went back.

There was still over half an hour to go before my day's work began, and I decided that it would be worth while having another half-hour's sleep, even though it meant the torture of getting up again. Better still, I would just lie down and enjoy the luxury of doing nothing. In the house men were already stirring, but I reached my bed without interruption and without taking off my boots flung myself upon it. I fell asleep instantly, and my sleep was quite dreamless.

When Clement woke me the rain had stopped and a pale sunshine came in through the window. From the north-east the noise of heavy guns came like the rumble of distant traffic. I washed and shaved, swaying on boneless legs before the little mirror, and when I had done, my breakfast was ready. I had not broken the first egg before Clement appeared to say that the car was waiting to take me to Hill Crossing. Bennet followed with a handful of papers—would I just run through these before I started, as they were urgent?—and then Jenkinson. I asked Jenkinson, "Everything carried out all

right?" and he said: "All O.K., sir." The sun had gone behind the clouds already, and Bennet said he thought we were in for a pretty foul day. "The river 'll be up again, sir. I doubt if you 'll get through to Hill Crossing, not unless you go round by Galoûme." I stuffed in one of the pieces of toast that Clement had solicitously burnt for me, and then Hale came in with more papers. Rather urgent, he said. Bennet said that H.Q. wanted to speak to me, and on the second telephone a querulous voice was asking how long they would have to wait for me at Hill Crossing.

IV

I PINNED up Heinrich's letter—the one addressed to me and my staff—as he had asked me to do. The officers all spoke to me about it, and I learnt from Bennet that the men were very much touched. Certainly it was a very beautiful letter—I use the word “beautiful” because “noble” is one that the present generation will not stomach—faultless in its English, dignified in its expression, inspired by a chivalry that has made the profession of arms greater than its purpose. It was signed “Heinrich Gotthold,” with his rank, regiment and decorations written very small underneath. He was right, I think, to add his dignities. I wish I still had the letter, but things developed very shortly after that, we were moved without any warning, and in the confusion of moving it was lost. No matter! There are three men still alive (there may be one more) who could recite it word for word; and for the other half-billion it would not have the same meaning. It was astonishing to me that the men took it as they did. A comment, perhaps, upon Heinrich's personality: or perhaps a glimpse of something that there is in humanity. It is not for me to argue such high matters.

I had trouble about the other letter, difficulties so insurmountable that they seem incredible to me now that I have forgotten the details and forgotten also the way that life went in those days. My own censorship of all correspondence was supposed to be supreme in that area, but actually there was a good deal of extra checking by specially trained censors, and following the discovery of Gotthold's activities, which for so long had been so successful, the vigilance was increased. My wife reminds me that at that time hardly one of my own letters arrived in Hampstead that had not been opened and thumbed on every page. In these circumstances the difficulty of getting a letter through to Germany, with any certainty that it would arrive complete, was formidable. I myself believed that it contained nothing more than what was written in plain German. It was unlikely that other authorities would take the same view without question.

I made inquiries through such brass-hats as I knew personally (as well as formal inquiries through the notorious usual channels, and for a long time I could get no definite reply. The affair soon

assumed the proportions of the cigarette-case mystery, and since I was as well occupied as before it was troublesome. At length someone (it may have been Lanair) told me quite definitely that by no possible means could I send the letter off with any hope that it would not be forwarded to the A.E.D., examined by them and more probably than not destroyed for safety. I could, of course, give it to someone who was going back and ask him to smuggle it through; but even then something might go wrong, and if the letter were found there would be questions asked about the sender. They had been getting devilish suspicious lately, and if you did things that looked queer you got it in the neck, no matter who you were. There were stories about a General who had been stripped and examined because someone said he had a field map tattooed on his backside. And so forth.

I cursed at the ridiculous obstacles to the fulfilment of my simple promise, but I funked the risks. My friend made the suggestion that I should write to the widow myself, explaining the difficulty of sending her letter, and promising to do so as soon as the opportunity offered. Upon this suggestion I acted.

My letter was a fairly long one. It had to be worded carefully, since in all probability it would break the news, and I think I re-wrote it four times. I told briefly the whole story of what had happened. I was frank about my own part in the affair (for at the time when I wrote I felt disposed to frankness). With difficulty, for my German was very groggy, I said something about my own feelings, about the difference between our relations as soldiers and as men. At the end I wrote that I had not read Heinrich's letter, but that I knew from what he had said to me the value it would have for her when she received it; and in a postscript I asked for a formal acknowledgment to be sent back through the same media.

Some time later the acknowledgment reached me, enclosed in a letter from my wife. It was in English—"Frau Kolonel Gotthold has received your letter." I would have wished it rather less formal, but my hope had hardly been an expectation, for we were not whole in spirit in those years.

* * * * *

It was a year's nightmare to me, that letter which Heinrich had written. Several times I thought of taking a chance and enclosing it in one of my letters to Peggy, but always I felt certain that it would not go through. I could have copied it, but I knew that a copy would be a poor substitute to send, and moreover I was anxious not to read the letter. So it was that the envelope remained with another, stitched inside my tunic, and I fretted about it constantly as ordinary

men do fret over trifles when there are larger things to crowd the mind. It travelled with me on strange journeys, and often I woke frightened, having dreamed that it had been lost. I can remember one spring day when I had had no sleep for many hours, looking down between the clouds on to one of the little towns of Western Germany and feeling a sudden impulse to rip the threads and pull out the letter and throw it over. But it was still there, creased and dirty, when after many weeks I was trying to pack my things into a bulging suitcase, with the steamer's whims throwing me backwards and forwards across the little cabin; and more weeks followed—for the news kept coming that transit was uncertain in the continuing chaos—before it left me.

It was a great day, for any accomplishment is precious when time has delayed and matured it. I wrote: "This letter has never been opened" on the crumpled envelope, put it inside a larger and stronger cover, sealed and registered it; and when I had walked slowly back from the post office I childishly smoked a cigar. The Albatross had sunk like lead into the sea.

But a fortnight later the letter came back, marked all over with scrawls and stamps which I took to be the equivalent of "Not known" and "Gone away." I was just off to North Africa when it arrived, and I was away for some time, so a further period elapsed before I could do anything about the matter.

I was not anxious for further journeying, but it seemed obvious that the only way of getting the letter to Frau Gotthold was to go and look for her. I could have written to friends or to officials in Berlin, but the correspondence would have been endless and the work of tracing is never quickly done through the agency of those one loves or pays.

We had reached a slack period at the Ministry, and I had no difficulty in getting a few days' leave. To get the necessary passport and visas was another matter altogether. In my own side of the shop I was accustomed to tolerant treatment; at the passport counter I was a fugitive from justice. Berlin? they said—it was not certain that Berlin existed. If it did exist the streets were running with blood, and by latest accounts the country was at present ruled by a gang of gipsies. *The Times*? What did *The Times* know about it? And in any case the railway line had been blown to smithereens in five places. And if I did get there I wouldn't sell anything because no one had any money. They were using all the money they had for kindling the Schlösser—it was the cheapest material available.

All these comments upon the nature of the little journey I proposed—they were delivered in a low phlegmatic tone by an elderly clerk with a pathetic subaltern moustache—were intended, I supposed, as a polished manner of saying that I was not the kind of person which the Foreign Office considered suitable to send as the representative of the British Empire in foreign parts; certainly the inquiries made into the subject of my birth and ancestry, and the precautions taken to check my statements, were very exhaustive; and their evident belief that I was a criminal of a particularly low order could well be excused, since an Australian surgeon had been none too skilful in replacing a piece of my face that had fallen off at Meurtes, and I had not then saved enough money to have the job done again.

At last, when I had hurried matters by getting a letter from a friend whose name was known, the formalities were over. The clerk gave me my be-visa'd passport with the gesture of royalty bestowing the accolade, but before he did so he opened the cover and bade me regard the terms of safe-conduct. "I think you ought to know," he whispered, "that that doesn't mean anything. Your best plan is to take a revolver with you." He stuck up his lower lip, forgetting that his cropped moustache was not long enough to suck the air through, snapped the book and held it. "Then," he added, "when you get to Ostend or wherever you get to they'll arrest you for transporting firearms and give you a few weeks gaol and send you home again. That'll be best for you in the long run."

The travel agency I visited was more reassuring. It had only just reopened, and seemed to be in the sole charge of a young woman who should still have been at school. She saw no difficulties whatever. She was sending boatloads of customers to all parts of Germany every day, she told me. There was never the slightest obstacle or annoyance. Travel in the Fatherland had never been so popular as long as she could remember. She received hundreds of letters every day from her clients saying what a good time they were having on the Rhine and in Prussia and even in America. (Except for putting her optimism in *oratio obliqua* I have quoted it verbatim.) Finally, if the passport people were any trouble, I was to send them to her.

I cannot think that a prodigy so self-assured was mistaken, and since no experience is the same to everyone I will not accuse her of having tried to mislead me. In my case, however, the prognostications of the sardonic clerk proved the more accurate, and I shortly learnt all the annoyances—the suspicions and hostility, the constant inspection and interrogation—that everyone now associates with post-war European travel. The journey was in other respects as uncomfortable as a civilian's journey could well be. The steamer

was overcrowded with a vast assortment of people, many so unpolished in appearance that I wondered why the Foreign Office had objected to me, soldiers on leave from the Ruhr, Belgians, Jews of many nationalities, and men who talked in little groups and would tell no one why or where they were going. It was rough, there seemed to be something wrong with the engines, and we were over an hour late getting in. The boat-train had gone, though why, when its passengers had not arrived, no one could say. Another train was found somewhere and an engine fitted on—a German engine, I noticed. There were only two first-class coaches, and from these I was excluded by stronger and ruder people. At Cologne I discovered, with very little surprise, that the sleeping-berth I had reserved was not available. (I learnt afterwards that the sale of sleeping-berth vouchers was at that time a notorious practical joke of the travel agencies.) I made myself as comfortable as possible, between two commercial gentlemen of bad odour but charming personality, and the train jogged along slowly as far as Dortmund. There we stopped for a long time; I should think it was not less than two hours. At first all the passengers remained hopefully in their places, but after a time they got out and walked in groups of two or three up and down the platform, exchanging rumours in their several tongues. Someone had heard from the guard—who was nowhere to be seen—that we were all to change to another train, which would be in shortly from Bochum. Then the story was that a railway strike had started, then that the driver would take the train no further until he had received his week's pay. There was a ragged boy selling nasty-looking oranges, and we bought all of them. At last it was definitely established that the crew of the train was waiting for news from Hanover, or possibly from Berlin, as to whether a strike had started or not. It would be unsafe, the stoker courteously explained to me, to go on without being sure that there were men in the signal-boxes. There had been a few accidents, he said, through neglect of that precaution. His ready wit saved him and his colleagues from a lynching. The news went from mouth to mouth that there were no men in the signal-boxes. We all waited now with comparative patience, some sitting huddled together for warmth in the carriages, some pacing up and down. All of a sudden the driver threw away the last piece of an orange he had been munching, the guard appeared from nowhere and waved his lamp. We rushed for the train and it moved off; stopped for ten minutes just outside the station and moved off again.

For the rest of the night I dozed and woke by turns; it seemed to be more waking than dozing, but actually I must have slept more

than I thought, for when I came suddenly to consciousness I saw a shaft of daylight coming into the carriage, and when I stretched across and pulled up a blind the sun was well up. We were passing through flat country, and presently we came to lines of ugly houses which I recognized as the suburbs of Berlin.

At a café in the Friedrichstrasse I had an excellent English breakfast.

The sky was clear and I wanted to stretch myself, so when I had left my bag at an hotel in Dorotheenstrasse I went on foot towards the Wilmersdorf district. The streets, I thought, seemed strangely empty compared with the streets I had known a few years before, and something, I could not quite determine what it was, gave the city an air of dilapidation. Perhaps there was no gaiety in the shop windows, perhaps the women who passed me were not so smartly dressed as the Berliner ladies of other days. I remember now little of what I saw—for my mind was then on other things—only the impression I had that the houses and streets had dried up. The shops, I know, were open, for I went into one or two to buy small necessities that I had forgotten to pack; and everywhere people were working, but the tone and *tempo* of the activity about me were lower and slackened and the people's faces were very quiet. It is possible that I imagined some of the differences I saw, for there were sad, fixed faces among those I had left in Holborn and Piccadilly. But I thought that these were different faces.

I went first to the house in Hummelstrasse where the letter was addressed, faintly hoping that I should find someone who could give me some information about Frau Gotthold. But it was empty and there were sale boards showing. At the corner of the street I found a little restaurant and there I made inquiries. The woman—I do not know whether she was waitress or proprietor—remembered the name and connected it with the house, but she could tell me nothing. She lent me her telephone book, but I found there a dozen Gottholds, none of them the one I wanted. Any one might be a relation, but I did not fancy the task of touring ten or more addresses and telling my complicated story at each. I thanked the lady, paid for my glass of beer, and went away.

In the end I came back to the telephone book. I had called at houses up and down the street, at some politely received, at others dismissed very brusquely. Most of the servants who came to the door said that their employer had moved in recently; others less quick of ear and intelligence could not understand what I said. One old

lady, who came to open the door herself, said that the Gottholds had been friends of hers; but she had lost sight of them completely. I gave it up at last and asked for the telephone book at a hotel nearby. "If it is a woman you are looking for," the proprietress told me, "she will have moved. And if it's a man he's probably dead." She said this without a hint of humour in her tone, and I wondered if it was her stock remark. I copied down the addresses of the first four or five Gottholds and gave the book back to her with rather elaborate thanks. She smiled then, but she did not look into my face.

I thought that her words must have been truer than she imagined, for at the first two addresses which I tried no Gotthold was to be found. At the third, however, I was lucky, much luckier than I had dared to hope after so many disappointments. It was the house, or rather the lodgings, of Herr Professor Ernst Gotthold. The Herr Professor was not in, the servant told me, but if I liked I could wait in his room. He was probably giving a lecture and he would be in for his meal before long. She showed me up to a big room on the second floor, and without further questions left me there.

It was plainly a bachelor's room, smelling of mustiness and stale tobacco, dust everywhere except in the most obvious places where a flick of the duster would move the worst of it without anything being shifted. I may have been wrong, but I guessed that the professor had lived there since his student days. Allowing for a domestic conservatism which is generally even greater with Germans than with ourselves, the furniture was grotesquely antiquated. The wallpaper had been up for so long that the pattern (mercifully) was only visible in a patch from which a picture had lately been moved. The carpet had been in the room nearly as long as the wallpaper. And the letters E.G., inscribed with a red-hot poker on the edge of the mantelpiece, seemed to betray youthful rather than senile vanity.

I liked the room. I could hardly have lived in it—certainly not worked in it—myself, because I have always loved convenience, and convenience implies to me a certain order. But I like my friends' rooms to be untidy, for their untidiness does not involve one in the irritation of small losses and I can enjoy at its best all the comfort and homeliness which the inspired lack of decency and order connotes. It was splendidly untidy, this room, and gloriously filled with books. On the shelves that covered the whole of one wall I found all the English classics, from the "Canterbury Tales" to "Alice in Wonderland" and "Sinister Street," mixed up with Kant and Goethe, Boccaccio, Balzac, Plato's "The Republic," Ibsen, Tchekov and Jerome K. Jerome. The books oozed over on to the floor, where they lay in sprawling heaps among faded manuscripts, piles of

Berliner Tageblatts and *Völkische Zeitungs*, theatre programmes and shopkeepers' receipts. There were pipes everywhere, huge German pipes fitted with lids and carved in quaint shapes, and on the walls such student trophies as old smoking-caps and duelling-swords, with photographs of youths in the costume of the nineties, a few good etchings ruined by the damp that had got inside the mounting, a vast, atrocious engraving of St. Paul's from the bottom of Ludgate Hill, with a twin picture of St. Mark's, Venice (both the property of the house, I suspected) and some framed silhouettes of university celebrities. They were pleasant things, the water-logged etchings and the silhouettes and the little bronze Beethoven on the mantelpiece, but I liked the smell of the room best of all. It was not an accustomed smell (for the difference between national tastes in tobacco is the chief curse upon travel) but I recognized it as a smell that corresponded with smells I knew, a sign that human beings travel in parallel lines in their journey towards culture. It prepared me for the professor, and he did not disappoint me.

I heard limping footsteps on the stairs, but I was intent upon a framed menu which bore the signatures of many well-known artists and I did not turn round until Herr Gotthold was well inside the room. When he saw me he yammered unintelligibly in some confusion. Evidently the servant had not warned him of my presence. I apologized for my intrusion and he asked me to sit down.

"You are English?" he asked. "Ah, no, it was not your accent, not that I assure you, but your bearing. The English have a manner, you know—I mean, it has always been so. That was why I always doubted—but that is another matter. It is interesting to meet an Englishman again—in the old days I knew so many, both here and at Heidelberg, but of late years I have only seen them in the distance—in the far distance as a rule."

He smiled, a cautious little smile with his eyebrows lifted a little to ask if it were too early for that kind of joke. I smiled back at him. He was a very urbane little man, good-looking according to the different fashion and nicely built, his physique only marred by his right leg, which was stiff from thigh to ankle. His shoulders were not those of a cripple, and from the little badge he wore in the button-hole of his blue jacket I knew that he had seen service.

"You will take luncheon with me, sir, will you not?" (I had not yet explained my business, but he seemed to ignore the need for an explanation.) "The service will be in five minutes, a very simple meal, only the rich feed well in these days, but it will be a pleasure if you will share it. I think I can find a bottle of Münchener beer—

they are the only good things that Germany has left, her Musik and her München, yes?"

I could not say "No" to such friendliness, and as my host was so talkative the matter of my errand could await the opportunity for leisurely explanation. From something familiar in the professor's features I guessed that I was not wasting my time. I said that it was extremely kind of him to offer entertainment to a complete stranger; that I had breakfasted so well that I was hardly hungry; but that if I might sit down with Herr Gotthold and perhaps take a little cheese and a glass of beer if that were available, I should be very happy to do so.

He went to the top of the stairs and called down that he was ready and would require two covers. From the tone of the voice which answered I guessed that it was not easy to provide extra at such short notice, but before I could interpose he shouted "Ach, Unsinn!" and came back.

"It is nice to meet an Englishman again," he said closing the door behind him. "I have not sat at table with an Englishman for five—six years. I wish I had a better meal to offer you. You have just arrived? Yes? You are staying here long?—ah, that is not my business, of course. You have been in Berlin before? before the war, yes? You will find everything much changed—yes, the buildings are there, and the river, but everything is naked, yes, we are all naked, we creep about all ashamed of ourselves and suspicious of each other. That is how I feel. My friends? I cannot say. You cannot know what another man is thinking, however much he tells you. But I myself, I wake up each day, and I find that things are going on, the noise in the street, the girl sweeping with her mop outside my bedroom door, and I wonder how it can be. It is curious, to me, that things go on so."

The servant turned the door-handle and banged the door open with the iron tray. Resting the edge of the tray on one corner of the table she leant over it and began to push the papers into a heap, preparatory to sliding the tray on further. The professor stumbled forward to avert the vandalism, clucking modest imprecations and trying to seize all his treasures at once. I helped him to shift the piles one by one, acquiescing in the noble pretence that they were all arranged in some designed order, while the girl watched us with a faint, scornful smile. When we had done she took the cloth off the tray, half unfolded it, shifted the tray on to the covered part, and with a few apparently clumsy but well-directed movements had arranged the meal.

"You see," Herr Gotthold said, "it goes on. It is so curious

to me, because I am never old enough to learn that my own experiences do not alter the world. I can remember being at the bottom of a hole, only my face out of the mud. I suppose I was only half-awake, because my leg had been bent backwards at the thigh and that had taken away my strength. A man fell down on top of me, all crumpled up and one arm fell across my face. He was dead. Then there was a terrible noise and another one came. He was not quite dead. And then two more. And now I am standing in my class room as I did before, explaining the theories of List and Ricardo to a few Polish and Austrian students. You will take some soup, yes?"

"None of us have any idea what has happened," I said.

"None of us," he asserted solemnly, "except the young men and women who write in the newspapers. They know what has happened, and what is happening to-day, and what is going to happen to-morrow. I read them all as fast as I can get them, the *Tageblatt*, the *Herald* of New York, the *Petit Parisien*, and all our own weekly papers. And when I have read them all I still do not know what is happening. Here, of course, it is all politics. Everyone is a politician and everyone has his party and his little war-cry. And there is a new revolution somewhere every day. I myself cannot understand politics at all. I am a simple man, and I can only understand a simple subject, such as Political Economy, which I try to teach to my students. Some more beer, yes do! I hardly know the names of the different parties. Let me see, first of all there are the National Republicans of the Right. . . ."

He was started then, and while I slowly sipped my soup he led me through the labyrinthine ways of German party-conflict; carefully, stopping again and again to repeat a difficult expression more slowly, to explain, to alter a phrase, to turn a sentence round so that I should better appreciate its exact meaning. A born teacher, he was perfectly comprehensible, unfailingly interesting. Tucked neatly into the pigeon-holes of his mind he had not only the major events of recent years but a hundred incidents that are reported in half a column in a newspaper and forgotten on the next day; a speech made at Dresden, an attack on the police in the Jewish quarter of Hamburg, the firing of a lighter in the harbour at Danzig; from these and other events still more trivial in to-day's perspective he traced the winding threads of causation till they led to the position he wanted to explain. I followed him breathlessly, believing that all the mysteries of new German history were being made plain to me for ever; till he turned another corner and I found that he was on new and more important ground, and that I was completely lost.

"But I have no real knowledge of these things," he said apologetically. "Besides, they are provincial matters. They are without importance to you in London and New York."

I begged him to go on, but he would not return to his subject. It could not possibly interest me, he repeated, and I guessed that in days gone by a fellow student of some other nationality had teased him for his seriousness and prolixity. Instead, he suddenly remembered that I must have visited him for some purpose, and asked with great politeness how he could help me; catching me, by this sudden inquiry, just when I had forgotten my avenue of approach.

I said, stammering a little, "It is just this, Herr Professor. I have no right to trouble you—but I came to Berlin hoping to find a lady of the same name as your own. She has left the address I had, and nobody knows where she has gone. I decided to call on the various Gottholds I could find in the telephone book, in the hope that one might be a relation and know where my friend—where the lady is to be found. So if you are not a relation of hers I have been wasting your time, I'm afraid."

He replied with a comic little bow, "On the contrary, sir, it is I who have wasted yours. And what is the name of your friend?"

"She is Frau Kolonel Heinrich Gotthold."

"And she is an old friend of yours?"

He asked the question rather sharply, his face stiffening suddenly and his eyes lighting.

"Her husband was a friend of mine," I said.

"Ah, in America perhaps? He paid a long visit to America before the war."

"No," I replied, "not in America. You knew him?"

"He is my brother."

"Then perhaps you can give me the information I want, if you will be good enough to do so?"

I put into my request the strongest intonation of politeness and all the courtesy phrases I could muster, for at this point I did not feel certain about the professor. He looked at me rather absently for a moment, and I knew that his brain was working frantically behind the veil of dreaminess; but almost at once he came to earth.

"Hedwig—my sister-in-law, yes, I will tell you about her." (I marvelled at his gallantry in pressing me no further for the reasons of my own acquaintance.) "They lived here, yes, in the Hummelstrasse, before the war. Indeed, she was living there till a short time ago. She moved suddenly without telling me and it was some time before I could find out where she had gone."

He spoke differently now, speaking of his private affairs to a

stranger; much more slowly and cautiously, looking at me as if he hoped to find out by my expression what I knew about his brother's wife.

I said: "I would have no right to ask you for details, even if I wished to do so. But if you give me Frau Gotthold's address——"

Perhaps he thought that he had shown an obvious and impolite reluctance, for he said at once: "But certainly I will! Only I must first explain to you why she is in poor circumstances now." Then, sensitively picking his words, he went on. "It is a long story, and I will not trouble you with all the facts. You know, perhaps, that Hedwig's mother died shortly after her marriage. It was found when she died that she was much poorer than she had always pretended, and her relations were not very pleased. They had thought that she was richer than she pretended to be, and they were looking forward to some little legacies. You must understand that money is very important with people of that kind, that is why they are not so fond of the Jews. It is the same in your country, perhaps?"

"It has been said," I told him, "that all Englishmen are proud of one of two things. Either of having a hooked nose or of not having one."

"So?" (He did not understand my meaning at all.) "Well, they vented their disappointment upon poor Hedwig. They had disliked her mother, you see, because she was a haughty woman, and they said that Hedwig had the same characteristics. She was a strange girl. Myself, I do not think they were just. There had been some trouble, a kind of a scandal, and it had turned the girl in upon herself. That is how I understand it; I have not met her very often, but she seemed to me always a woman who was forced to go by herself in a world of her own—like your Robinson Crusoe, you understand? She was very beautiful, and I think she had a beautiful heart, but outside she was cold. In public she was cold even to her husband. Her relations said 'She is just the Baroness again, cold and proud and without any feeling.' So when the mother was dead and they had nothing more to hope for they ceased to have anything to do with Hedwig. It is often like that with people who are rather grand and not very rich. You have found it so?"

I was listening to him rather confusedly, for my thoughts were trying to wander down a narrow path that had suddenly opened for them. The name, of course, was a common one, but—then I made a fresh effort to concentrate on what the professor was saying, lest by some careless question or interjection I should betray my absent-mindedness. I had already missed a few sentences.

"—were not any kinder to her than her own relations had been.

They had been made to understand that my brother had married above himself, and they did everything they could to make out that she was not a good wife to him. For months all the letters I received from my father and my aunts and uncles were full of nothing else. I grew so tired of this wicked talk that whenever I could I avoided meeting my own people, and I absolutely refused—on one pretext or another—to be present when there were several of them gathered together for gossip. I did not know all the facts, you see, and a man in that position cannot hold his own against the general opinion, even when he knows that it is malicious. There was the little boy. They all said that she worshipped him to the exclusion of her husband. We are old-fashioned in our outlook and we still say that a woman has special duties towards her husband. And the little boy was quite unlike his father—that made things worse, and there was a great deal of scandalous innuendo. People are always ready to invent things about people they do not like. There was nothing in what they said; it was outrageous, but when the story was once started it gained such a hold that everyone came to believe it as the truth."

His eyes had moved away from my face, and he was "looking from him," as the Scot says, in the direction of the window. I recognized that look as a common one among teachers—I remembered specially an old metaphysician lecturing at Corpus who became so abstracted by his subject that his voice fell to a mumble, and he would not have noticed, I believe, had his class quietly left the lecture-room. It may have been that this was the first time that Ernst Gotthold had spoken his thoughts about his brother's wife; and that as he came to give them expression the various recollections, the odd fancies and half-formed surmises that lay strewn in his mind as the books and papers were strewn about his room, had to be sorted and picked out before they would fit into the tidy pattern of sentences. I would have liked to ask him a dozen questions—for my own thoughts were far from tidy—but for more than one reason I held my tongue.

"I saw her only once or twice during the war. I was busy delivering my country from her oppressors, as the newspapers told me, and I had not much leave. What I did get I spent mostly with an old friend in Hamburg. I did not like to see Berlin, because it reminded of all the good life that seemed to have passed away for ever. I never saw my brother after the spring of 1914, and later on no one seemed to know what had happened to him, though it seemed to be understood that he was doing what was called 'special work.' Hedwig, when I saw her, told me nothing. She talked very little, and only said in answer to my direct question that her husband's people never came to see her. I do not think she welcomed me very

much—perhaps she suspected that I was really like the rest of my family. She is a strange woman, very difficult to understand. I sometimes think that when she was a child some accident must have happened. I don't know. After a time I heard that my brother was on the list of those missing—there were no details as to what had or could have happened. His wife gave me no news whatever. When I got back to Berlin I called several times, but she was always out. I wrote, and she replied to say she was not well—that she could not see visitors or undertake any correspondence. I saw her at last. She seemed very much distracted and would not allow me to talk upon any subject of importance. 'That's all over,' she said, 'that's all over.' But things I saw and heard gave me the idea that there was a difficulty about her pension. Many widows have had difficulties about the pension, and it may be that because her husband is not on the list of those known to have been killed—because he was on special service and everyone it seems had lost sight of him—the authorities were not so willing to do anything. There has been a great deal of chaos, you see. If a woman can say 'My husband was killed at this battle or in that retreat' there is a good chance that she will get her money, no matter what is happening at the moment to the war department, or who the finance ministers are. But this is a case where the husband was forgotten by nearly everyone long before he was officially on the 'missing list'; and though his fellow-officers were devoted to him they were not so devoted to his wife. Well, what was I to do? I called again, and the boy came to the door and said that his mother would see no one. The next time I went round they had gone. The house was empty and there was a board up to say it was to be sold. I went to the agent and he gave me the address he had. I have it here."

He reached for a volume of *Das Kapital*—I noticed that it was his own edition—and began to hunt among the various slips of paper that had been stuck in between the leaves. "I'm sure it's among these," he said. In the middle of the search he glanced up at me suddenly with a questioning look. "I should not have troubled you with all that," he said apologetically. "You only asked me for her address. But you see, I was led away by my thoughts. I have always been so interested in poor Hedwig, and nowadays I meet no one who knows her and wants to talk about her. It is a great pleasure to me to find someone who knows her."

I had to be honest then, but still I had not decided how honest I would be. "I have never known Frau Gotthold," I said (wondering if this could possibly be untrue). "I have only known her husband—your brother. I came across him in France."

He looked at me squarely. I think he realized that it was not only the weakness of my German which made me speak with such hesitation.

"Perhaps you can tell me what happened to him?" He tried to voice his question as if it did not really matter.

"Yes. He was caught spying and—of course—shot."

He nodded.

"Yes," he said, "I thought that was what had happened."

I look back with pleasure on that first meeting with Ernst Gotthold in his own shabby lodgings. It was painful at the time, though the least disagreeable of the events of those few days; but now I have to make an effort to remember how difficult much of our conversation was, how I felt—as perhaps he did—that we were ridiculously playing a drama, speaking lines uncertainly remembered, with ourselves as the only audience. What has remained so much larger in my mind is how greatly I liked the man, his quietness, his sensitive features, the light and shade in his voice. He was not a celebrity then, though his work was already known by specialists in both continents, and as I then knew political economy only as a strange branch of learning to which Cambridge men were addicted I saw the professor as just a schoolmaster with the good schoolmaster's most lovable characteristics. That is what he is still to me, though I have sat since then among men whose names are ranked with those of Nicholson and Marshall and who listened to him almost with bated breath; and if we small men find pleasure in knowing great ones the pleasure is far keener when we have known them without their robes of greatness. I think that the circumstances of our first meeting would have robbed it of all warmth but for two things: that I saw Heinrich, his facial expressions and his little gestures, brought to life again in his brother; and that in meeting such a man I could doubt if the poison of those four years had been enough to destroy everything. I have a letter which Ernst sent me some time afterwards in which he writes of that meal we had together. I read it more often than I read his little book on Kartels.

He found the address at last—it was in a different volume—and when I had copied it I took my leave as quickly as possible. It did not occur to me at the time, but I realized shortly after I had left him, that he did not ask my name. I promised, however, to write when I had seen Frau Gotthold.

I went back to my hotel to look up a train, intending to cancel my engagement of a room and go on the same evening if possible.

The hotel manager, I thought, was more likely to have some reliable knowledge of trains than the professor. Birnewald was the name of the town, and the manager, as it turned out, had never heard of it. He was convinced that I was mistaken, and with no excess of politeness suggested that I might be thinking of the name of some hotel which appeared in my travel-book. But it was in the railway timetable. He said then that the time-table could not be relied upon, and that I had better make inquiries at the station; for all he knew the railway might have been taken over by the French by this time as reparations. At the station I learnt that if I caught a train at 5.15 the next morning and changed at Bingen I should, *Deo volente*, get to Birnewald somewhere about midnight. The girl who gave me this information made it clear that it was no concern of the railway's whether I ever got to Birnewald at all. I was beginning to realize, from these small gestures and attitudes, that comparatively speaking we had won the war.

Actually I reached Birnewald after a muddled and exasperating journey with countless waits and changes, at about noon the day after I had left Berlin. And arriving there I began to look back upon Berlin as a gay and unscathed city.

There were no porters on the platform at Birnewald, no one to suggest that the train had been expected. A man with his arm in a sling slouched up to the luggage van and took away a parcel, while a few odd pieces of baggage—a bicycle, a sack or two, and a solitary sheep—were bundled out and left standing on the platform. A few passengers got out of the train, which was fairly empty, after being packed as far as Neunburg. A forlorn child covered with impetigo took our tickets, and we passed out into the long, dismal street.

The sky was quite clear, and the town was lit by a bright, rather watery sunlight. A sharp wind blew little storms of dust and dirty paper along the pavements. It was the day for a long walk in the country.

In the station yard the tramlines came to a dead end, and I noticed that a little way along the tracks there were stones and mud wedged in them. The roads leading right and left were unpromising; one, I thought, probably turned round into a goods yard and the other was only a narrow, sloping passage-way that separated the railway line from a block of tall tenement houses. I followed the tramway along half a mile of austere street with beer-houses, apparently closed for ever, on either side, and came to the central square. It was

actually square in shape, with a little circle of park railed off in the centre. Here there were ugly shrubs planted which barely served to hide the iron lavatory about which they were ranged. The Rathaus, huge and expensive, filled most of the north side, though there was just room for a little building in more modest style which I fancy was the Polizei. At right angles to these pretentious municipalia ran a line of solid houses which I supposed from the tall windows and important entrances to be the residence of the town's high officials and aristocracy. They were shabby, with the surface of the stone crumbling; many of them empty, and others plainly in the possession of caretakers; but in their heavy symmetry they had kept an air of dignity, and I thought that they still gazed rather superciliously at the Lutheran church which towered opposite them, dominating the west side of the square with its bulk and its red-brick ugliness. The buildings on the south side are very dim in my memory, but I think they were late nineteenth-century balconied houses, fussy as to the roofs and windows, with shops on the street level.

The square was almost deserted, but as I limped along the pavement, changing my heavy bag from one hand to another at every few steps, I was accosted by a policeman. He asked me a number of questions and wanted to see my passport. Even when he had let me go he followed me with his eyes.

The tramlines went all round the square, but there were no trams running. It was a very respectable square, but for the rubbish that was scattered everywhere in the roadway, and the quietness reminded me of an English Sunday. I looked all round for a hotel, and saw what I thought was one on the same side as the church. It was a hotel, but they said they could not receive me. They were not prepared for visitors, they said, and they had no servants. I expressed my surprise, but the old man who had answered the bell only repeated that the servants had all gone away. "They think they will get more money by trying to stop one of the trains up the line," he added, then shut his mouth as if to show me that he thought conversation a waste of time. Could he tell me of anywhere where I could get a room? Were any other hotels open? Well, no, if there was a hotel open, which he doubted, I would not be well advised to take a room there. It was better when you were thrashing a dog to stand beyond the reach of his chain, otherwise the dog might bite you. (He said this as if he were merely expounding a fact of natural history. Not a look or a note in his voice to point a sneer.) But if I liked I could try at the first of those houses on the other side. That was where the mayor usually lived, and the mayor had got in the way of a machine-gun some months before. As far as he knew

there wasn't a new mayor yet, people were not much interested in mayors nowadays, and the caretaker would probably give me a room if I gave her some English money—a tenth of a pound would do, most likely. A meal? Well, even a meal might be got with English money, but I had better not eat it when anyone was looking.

A curious old man, I could not make him out at all. Something made me suspect that it was not lack of servants that kept me out, but the fact that his accommodation was already exhausted. I had an idea—I had understood snatches of conversation in the train—that there might be a dozen men to a room sleeping in that hotel; or possibly it was filled with more sinister objects; why, otherwise, should he refuse me when he so evidently understood the value of an English treasury note? However, I picked up my bag and wearily crossed over to the other side of the square.

The caretaker at the house he had recommended either would not or could not understand a word I said. But a few doors off I was more fortunate. This house seemed to be in the sole charge of a respectable old woman; possibly a retainer of the family that had lived there, possibly a woman of higher estate than that. (When the clue of accent is hidden in a strange language I often find it difficult to place the rarer types socially.) At first she was very cold in her manner. Accepting me as a foreigner she did not ask my nationality, preferring, I imagined, to let herself believe that I was a badly educated Dutchman; and I was careful, in showing her my English money, to speak as if I had picked it up by chance. After inquiring carefully into my business in the town, for which questions I had prepared answers simpler and more plausible than the real one, she said that she could let me have a bed. She was not sure about blankets, and if I wanted my boots cleaned I must do it myself. I assured her that I was a man accustomed to perform such duties, and I even kindled a little flame of sympathy by describing the weariness and vexations of the journey from Berlin. She began rather to like me, and she must have hoped devoutly that I had been born in Holland.

The room to which she led me was a very large one, facing the square. The blind was down, and she asked me not to raise it. "I will get a lamp," she said. When the lamp came I saw that my bed was a magnificent four-poster. It would have filled entirely a bedroom of ordinary size, but in this long and lofty chamber it was not out of proportion; indeed, it was not big enough to dispel the chilliness which the vastness of its setting suggested. There was a wardrobe against the wall opposite the door, built on the same scale as the bed,

but most of the lighter furniture had been taken away. An old counterpane covered a pile of broken chandeliers and such knick-knacks in the corner of the room. There were no pictures.

Without my asking, the old woman brought me a can of hot water; but when I mentioned food she said very firmly that I must go elsewhere for that. No, she could not suggest anywhere.

"If I offered this would I get two eggs?" I asked, and showed her a half-crown piece.

She did not know the coin.

"Eight of them make a pound," I explained.

Then she said that she might find someone who would sell her one or two eggs for me.

In that way the food problem of my short stay at Birnewald was solved. I could only have simple necessities—no milk and no white bread—but if I paid beforehand and promised each time to be sure to keep the blind down she brought me just enough food to stave off my hunger. I do not know how much she bought outside, or how much came from some store, beneath a pile of bedding perhaps, in one of the remotest rooms of the house. She charged me about ten times the amount that the food would have cost at that time in England (had any tradesman dared to sell it) and allowing for a reasonable profit I thought—or came to think when I had seen more of Birnewald—was approximately its true economic value. For she was an honest old thing.

When I had broken a fast of some eighteen hours and rested a little while I found my hostess—Frau Zuckermann I think her name was—and told her I was going out. She advised me to be careful and to be in again before dark. "But it is fairly safe now," she added, "a new detachment of police has arrived and for a week now nothing serious has happened."

It was warning enough. I asked her my way to the address Ernst had given me—75 Krugenstrasse—and she explained it to me as well as she could. She gave me a little smile when I raised my hat to her, and I guessed that she had had children. Then she looked frightened and shut the door quietly.

The clouds had come up fast while I had been indoors, and the change from the cold brightness made me think for a moment that the sun was already going. But glancing at my watch I found that it was not yet three o'clock. The square, which before had been eerie in its vast emptiness, was now gloomy and foreboding. I wondered whether the church had a bell, and if so whether it was ever rung. Behind me the massive houses were menacing, with their drawn blinds and unsmoking chimneys. Even the Rathaus, built so

that it would never acquire a noble antiquity, had taken on so unreal an air that the word "macabre" was in my mind as I looked at it. I wanted to stand somewhere near the middle of the square, as far away as possible from the empty buildings and the buildings that might not be empty. For the first and only time in my life I realized what might be meant by "claustrophobia"; standing there in a square as big as a football field.

I told myself that it was the effect of the journey. That was partly the truth, for the noise of the train was still drumming in my ears and I still had the sensation, which one gets from incessant motion and long hours in a stuffy compartment, that my eyes were not fixed properly in my head and that my sense of gravity had shifted. I felt no hankering for the taste of tobacco, but for its slightly narcotic effect I lit a cigarette. Then I turned up my collar, a little action that brought reassurance, and made for the street which came into the square just by the hotel. I had to follow this street, which bent in places but kept its main direction, for about two miles.

I passed first by the Unstein houses. "Good examples of Unstein's earlier work," my guide-book calls them; I have not seen the Marienkirche at Birnewald, but unless it is much finer than the art postcards suggest the houses remain as the only thing worth going to the town to see. I believe that in normal times they serve as museums. They were empty when I saw them; heavy planks had been nailed across the doorways, and barbed-wire stretched between stakes kept people away from the windows. I suppose the precautions were necessary, but these houses seemed to require protection less than the line of mansions in the square, for there could be no grudge now against the wealthy burghers who had stepped out of them to enter their carriages four centuries before. True there were small pieces of masonry lying on the ground inside the wire; tourists would have hooked them with their umbrellas. I do not know how they came to have fallen, nor indeed where they had fallen from, for the eaves looked quite unscathed. Perhaps a stray machine-gun bullet had knocked away some loose stone from a crevice where the damage was not noticeable. But I smiled, as an Old Testament prophet might have smiled, at the idea of these pensioners buckling on cheap armour in case they should be abused in the hazards of a street skirmish. On both sides of the street the Unsteins stopped together, giving place with an Irish note of comedy to flat stone houses. It was here, I think, that the old market-place had been until the fire of 1862 destroyed the adjoining buildings on the east side and civic aspiration found a larger outlet in the Bismarckplatz. Instead of setting the houses back so as to widen the boundaries of the street the builders

had faithfully followed the line of the medieval houses; and for this deference to traditional awkwardness the new houses had paid in the last few months, for the walls were covered with new scars, and there was hardly a pane of glass unbroken. Lower down, the street widened a little, but it was narrow again before it got to the canal, which I crossed almost without noticing, the warehouses on either side standing close against the banks and the bridge's ramps being heightened by wooden hoardings. Soon, as the villas dwindled into ugly cottages, I could see over on the left the long line of factories.

All the little streets on the left side ran straight to the factory walls. They were neat, these little streets, quite straight on both sides but in nearly every one the roadway was in bad condition. In some the road had never been properly laid at all, and the people stepped from their industrial cottages on to horse lanes. In others the surface had simply fallen out of repair. There were mounds and ditches, heaps of sandy mud here and there, puddles six inches in depth. The kerb stones lounged at an angle, most of the drains were stopped up, some of the lamp-posts had fallen over and lay half across the road, while few of those that were still standing had lamps on them. A few children sat on the footpaths, but they were not playing. Looking down these half-mile cracks in the ocean of brickage I had a glimpse of the factory area, tall buildings and overtopping chimneys which reached for two or three inches between the edge of the working colony and the high ground beyond. Gaunt frameworks of twisted steel and the ragged edge of charred brick walls showed that here and there a factory had been burnt out; but most of them were still standing, silent and lifeless, with their smokeless chimneys still reaching towards the clouds. There were more people about here, and I passed two or three young men who were in field-grey, not the uniform of the *Polizei*. They were not active-service men. It was still mostly women that I saw, some of them in groups with their children. Wherever there was a larger group than usual a policeman was not far away. There were faces at the windows everywhere, faces which peered through the glass for a moment and then disappeared; sometimes men's faces. I kept remembering, as I went along, a week I had spent during the first months of the war in a place called Gallon-Dirennes. Some of the women glanced at me as I passed, but I hardly looked at them, and I held my eyes quite away from the children.

I kept to the tramlines and came presently to a place where a barricade had been built across the roadway, guarded by a picket of police. I went through a good deal of trouble here. I had to show

my passport and was closely interrogated by one of the men, a caricature of the elderly German, big, fat and bald, whose parents had taught him a different language from that which my schoolmasters had taught me. My pockets were searched, and while I breathed a prayer of thankfulness that I had not even a penknife on me it occurred to me, for the first time, that it was pure madness to walk about this place without a weapon of some kind tucked in a sock or a body-belt. But lack of imagination is its own solace, and before I was out of sight of the picket I had forgotten that my shabby travelling clothes were dangerously splendid among people who hid their nakedness with old curtains and sacking and cloths torn from the backs of pianos. Here I had reached villadom again and there were a few shops open, a chemist's, a little bootshop and a hardware merchant. I saw one or two women hurrying along with parcels. About two houses in five were empty. When I reached the fountain I turned right, as Frau Zuckermann had directed me, and went up a long wide street with a solid phalanx of grim *fin-de-siècle* houses on each side. There were no broken windows here. A few of the houses were formidably fenced off with barbed-wire, but most of them had something to give a hint that they were occupied, and some of the windows were boldly decorated with faded curtains. I caught a glimpse of an old man with beard and swaggering moustachios who glared at me with his fierce little eyes from a round window above one of the porticoes. From another window of that house the flag of Imperial Germany was flying. The street bulged out into a little circus with a bandstand in the middle. The bandstand had been carefully barbed-wired. Tributary streets ran right and left here, but I kept on in the same direction. The little restaurant at the corner, which was my next landmark, had been burnt down, but a signboard bearing the proprietor's name lay, as if specially to guide me, propped against an iron table. So I turned right again, and climbed up a sharp little rise, and at the top I saw the name "Krugenstrasse" marking the street on my left. I took out my note-case and opened it. The letter was there all right. Fifty yards down the street I came to Number 75.

The shutters were closed across the top windows but on the ground floor the single front room (the house was semi-detached) was quite unshielded. There was a short path between the front gate and the door—ten feet or so of suburban dignity—and three steps up. Standing on the second step I could see into one side of the room. There was a wardrobe, open and apparently serving as a kitchen dresser; an uncovered wooden table and a chair or two; nothing on the walls, from which the paper hung down like the conventional

draperies of a semi-nude statue. The bell, placed in the middle of the front door, was of an ingenious local pattern with which I was not acquainted, but after a few false attempts I succeeded in ringing it. To my surprise it was answered promptly.

I was surprised again when I saw that it was a man, a short, well-built little man in a workman's vest and trousers. His look was frightened and hostile, but I recognized at once a variation on a type I knew and loved. The alacrity with which he clicked his heels left no doubt as to his training, though he was not in parade-trim. He had not shaved for a week at least, and he was extremely dirty. From a yard away the odour of his breath, a fragrance in which vinegar was dominant, came to me in gusts when he spoke. His teeth were so rotten that had the modern medical theories been even approximately correct he would have been a dead man. His trousers were ragged and the state of his vest was beyond literary description. But he was a fine looking fellow, square in the shoulders, his right arm all bulging muscle, his left arm gone. Beneath the hair on his face I could see that he had somehow kept his skin free from disease; it was sun-hardened, drawn tight over the flesh like the miracle-skin which Meunier has given his statues. And he had beautiful dark eyes. He was frightened, but he did not cower. His fear went naturally into sharpness, and leaning a little forward with his fist clenched he asked abruptly what I wanted.

"Does Frau Kolonel Gotthold live here?" I asked.

"No!" he answered automatically.

"Ah, that is a pity," I said.

Having shown that I did not believe him I stood still and gave him time to reflect. I could see that already he was thinking.

"You are English, sir?" he asked suddenly.

"Yes." Then, following the lead of his "sir," I added: "I was an officer in the army."

"Well," he replied. "There are English and English, and——" (there was a note of real bitterness in his voice) "there are officers and officers."

He still looked at me curiously, and as I did not go he volunteered another remark.

"I've known a lot of English," he said.

I caught at the thread.

"Oh yes? In the war?"

"Yes, at——" (His pronunciation of the French name was unfamiliar to me, and I did not catch it.) "I was in a prison-camp there. But I got away."

"You got away? Well done! Not easy, eh?"

He may still have been suspicious of me, but he could not resist my invitation to tell his stories. "You had better come inside," he said, "there are Polizei prowling about and they want to poke into everything."

His enthymeme seemed inadequately related, but it was not in my programme to say so. I went into the dingy little hall, shutting the door behind me, and to carry his hospitality further he led me down a little flight of steps into the kitchen.

"We can sit down here," he said simply.

I offered him a cigarette, which he took with a delighted smile.

"We don't get so many now," he said.

I struck a match and held it for him. "Well, we were all in it," I said, pointing to my face.

He nodded. "Yes, four years, me. Marne, Somme, Dardanelles——"

"You had a bad time?" I prompted.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Uncomfortable," he said. "Not nice to look at, that kind of thing. The food was always bad, and some of the officers, well, as I said——"

"Quite!" I agreed.

"But it was all right for me. A change, you see. Even the food, I could stand that. I was from the Ruhr, and the first thing I can remember is the mines. I think I was born at the bottom of a mine. Well, I don't know, but I learnt to hew before I learnt to talk—that's what I always think."

It was rather difficult to follow him, particularly when he tried from time to time to use his few phrases of English. But I nodded encouragement. I wanted to make him friendly; and I wanted, too, to give myself a few more minutes' respite.

"Yes," he went on meditatively, "the war was bad in some ways. Especially in winter. I was always cold. When I was a lad I had to work hard, but when my work was over there was always a room to go to, a little room in a basement we had, and you all got close together and shut all the windows and you got warm that way. In the trenches it was always cold. Still, you were moved about. That made the time go quicker."

"You had your share of the front line?"

He nodded. "Yes, that is where I first got to know the English. For a whole week, in the F trench as we called it, we were so close that we could hear them talking. They used to call out 'Good night, Jerry!' You have a sense of humour, you English. We collected

things—you know—and threw it over. Then they threw theirs back. We had to make an agreement to stop after a time. It was too uncomfortable." (He grinned rather charmingly, showing all his hideous teeth together.) "Then I was taken prisoner, and I got to know the English better. They were not so very clever. I got away."

"And when did you get out?" I asked.

"Out of the prison-camp?"

"No, out of the army."

"The army? Oh, not till it was over—no, not till after that. I could still do jobs, you see, pushing little trolleys from one depot to another, that sort of thing. That would have been all right—I slept in a proper room and there was no drilling and the work was quite easy—only the food was very bad. Worse than what they gave you in the trenches. And, of course, there was no chance of it ending, which I had always been used to. In a mine, you see, you never know when there will be another explosion. And it was like that in the trenches. But when I was pushing my little trolleys I always knew that I would go to bed again at midnight, when the work finished. It made me restless at first. Still, I have got used to that now."

"And now?"

"Now," he said magnificently, "I am a gentleman-butler."

I could have taken him off his guard by asking "To whom?" But my curiosity had been aroused and I no longer doubted that he would tell me the simple truth I wanted to know in due course. So I was less direct.

"How did you get that job?" I asked.

The details of the affair were evidently not very clear in his mind, and for a few seconds he was lost in contemplation.

"There was a corporal," he said at last, "he used to tell us when we could stop work and give us our pay and that kind of thing. He was our general—if you understand—there was no one else. One day—it was when the war was over but we were still pushing the trolleys and counting the parcels as they came in—we all lined up outside the office to get our pay. It was Sunday morning. The last week there hadn't been any pay, because the government had forgotten to send it. We waited for a long time, until we should hear the corporal call out: 'Kommt herein, Schweinhundel!' Then we got impatient and kicked the door open and there was no corporal. Gone altogether! We thought he might have gone into the town to find a girl, but when the next day came there was no sign of him. So Thomas—that was my friend—said 'I'm off,' and off he went, the

rest of us waited a bit longer to see if the corporal would come back, then we went away also."

At this point he blew out the last of a little store of breath he had been hoarding. That, he seemed to think, was the end of the story I had asked for. But I pursued him.

"But how did you get here——?"

With the same reluctance, reluctance rather of the mind than of the will, he went on again.

"Here? By the railway. On a truck."

His words emphasized the vague simile which my mind formed—the goods train starting with a jerk, halting until all the trucks have^{*} caught up and banged against each other, and with a repetition of the whole series of concussions moving slowly on. I gave the butler another cigarette, which he rolled deliciously between his lips before he would light it.

"Yes," he said, "it was easy enough to get on a truck, because I knew which ones were empty and when I could climb in without being noticed. There were two of us together. Just two in the whole of an empty truck, and no corporal to say that we mustn't do such-and-such—it was luxury. I began to think that it was a good thing that the war was over. We stayed there until we had finished our rations—we had taken what we could find from the store. We were there for two days—perhaps it was three. Not moving all the time. Sometimes we went into a siding and stayed there for some hours, then we went on again, slowly, for hours and hours. When we got to this place I was hungry and I slipped out. My friend stayed in the truck. He thought it might be taken to Berlin, and he had always wanted to see that place. I told him that only rich people were allowed in Berlin, but he wouldn't listen; he had just got comfortable, he said, and he wasn't particularly hungry and he still had a packet of cigarettes. I think now that he was cleverer than I was, because there was very little to eat here then, less than there is now. I thought I should find some work to do in one of the factories—I had heard that there were boot factories at Birnewald—but when I asked they told me that all the factories had been made into munition factories ever so long ago. I said 'Well, I shall try and get some work in a munition factory,' and then they told me that there wasn't any more need for munitions. I asked what they were using for the machine-guns they had fixed up at the corners of the streets, but they said they were just using up some of the munitions that were left over from the war. They had stopped shooting at the French, you see, so now they were shooting at the German people who were angry because they couldn't get any work in the munition factories. Then some

soldiers came and asked me where my discharge papers were, and I said I had lost them, and they put me in prison. But there wasn't room for everyone they wanted to put in prison, and after a few days, when I still hadn't found my discharge papers, they let me go again. Everything was this way and that way. We had all stopped fighting the French and the English, and we didn't know what to do next. Everyone said that they had got to have a new government, or that they had just got a new government, but it didn't seem to me to make much difference. The thing was to find where there was any food to steal."

He had become rather lost in his narrative, and I had to prompt him again.

"And then you got your job here? How did that happen?"

"I took the house first," he explained, "and then the job came along. It was like this. You were not supposed to come to this part of the town, because the rich people here did not like the revolutions. But I knew how to get through well enough. I used to come along this street to see if I could find anything and I noticed that this house was empty. I wasn't sure at first—there were curtains in the windows, and I could see furniture inside—but after a time I thought it was pretty certain, and I made myself a key in a way I had learnt in the army. When I got in I found that I was right. Plenty of furniture in some of the rooms, but nobody about anywhere. Not even a corpse. So I brought along my little properties—I had a bag for collecting food and one or two things—and settled down. There were no soldiers round this part you see, only Polizei, very old men with rheumatism. They didn't notice anything. It was a long way to come back after collecting things in another part of the town, but I didn't mind that. It's comfortable here. I have a sofa to sleep on and I can shut all the windows and keep warm."

"But your job?" I reminded him.

"My job, yes! Well, it wasn't long after I had moved when a lady came to the door with a boy. I didn't know what she wanted at first. I thought she might want to sell the boy. She asked me if Frau Donitzer was at home, and I said 'No, she had been gone some time.' She seemed very upset. She had come all the way from Berlin to stay with this Frau Donitzer who was a relation of hers, and she hadn't known that Birnewald was all full of soldiers and revolutions, and now Frau Donitzer wasn't here and she didn't know what to do. I felt sorry for her, I tell you. She was a very strange lady and she kept saying something about both her husbands being dead and only the boy being left, and crying and all that. So I said:

'See here, gnädige Frau, I have been stationed by the Government to look after this house, and to see that no one comes in, but as it belonged to your relation I will hire the top rooms to you as long as you like!' So we fixed a price—she had some money and you could still get things with money then—and I said I would get her some food every day with the money she gave me and keep a little for myself. Of course, the money's no good now, but I still get her what food I can and clean the floors for her—she's a nice lady, though she had a Sparren zu viel." By the international gesture of tapping his forehead he made his meaning clear.

I was beginning to ask for more details of the lady when I heard a door opening upstairs and a voice called "Konrad!"

It was like an old woman's voice.

"Konrad! The fire is nearly out. Have you found any wood?"

"Coming, gnädige Frau!"

He went across the room and picked up a little broken table that lay in the corner. Placing his foot on one of its legs he wrenched off two of the others and using foot and hand together snapped each into two pieces. With my two useful arms I could not have done the job half as quickly.

"I won't be a minute," he said, picking up the pieces and going towards the door.

I stopped him.

"One minute! Will you tell Frau Kolonel Gotthold that a gentleman wants to speak to her. If she asks any questions you had better say you think he's a Dutch gentleman."

He did not look at all sheepish. Perhaps he had forgotten.

"All right!" he said.

He went upstairs briskly—privation seemed to have done nothing to affect his health or physique—and as he reached the top I heard the woman ask: "Were you speaking to someone at the door?" Then Konrad's reply: "Yes, it was a Dutch gentleman who wants to speak to you. I have been——" The door closed.

I waited for two or three minutes, and then Konrad came down.

"She will see you," he said.

He led me upstairs and across the landing, knocked at a door, and opened it.

"Der holländische Herr!" he announced, and left me.

On the side of the room which faced the street the shutters were closed, and the light only came in through a chink and a hole here

and there. But there was a small window high on the adjacent side and though this looked on to the wall of the next house it allowed a twilight, reflected by the light paper above the door, to ease the darkness, so that the smaller and remoter objects were only invisible to me when I first went in. Konrad had stirred up the fire, and the wood he had put on was already kindled, so from that side, which was opposite the big windows, another feeble light broke across the room in confusing flashes. For a moment I thought the room was deserted, but a slight movement led my eyes towards the fire and there to the right of it Frau Gotthold was sitting in a low basket chair. Her back was towards me. She turned her head round slowly, and when she saw me I could see that she smiled faintly. It was only a conventional smile.

I heard her ask in a low voice "Der holländische Herr?"

I brought my heels together and said: "Gnädige Frau!" For the moment it was all that I could think of to say, but she relieved me.

"I must apologize for the darkness of the room," she said, "we do not have many visitors. It is necessary to keep the shutters closed. There are all kinds of ruffians in the streets."

She spoke rather dreamily, as an old woman who has ceased to talk very much; but her voice was even and controlled.

"You will sit down?" she asked.

There was a chair a few feet from hers on the other side of the fire, and I went forward to take it. I was still uncertain of my approach, tempted just to give her the letter and take my leave, but afraid that it would be cowardly and discourteous to do so. I wished now that I had left the letter in the safe hands of Konrad. My only purpose in taking it up myself had been to sweep away the haunting suggestion that had disturbed my mind since my conversation with Ernst. I had been fearing ever since then that the hand of coincidence, which had more than once played tricks with my life, was moving the pieces for a master-stroke. I had been doubtful still when I heard Frau Gotthold's voice in the kitchen below, but when I heard it from a few feet away, and when I saw—in flashes as the flames danced up from the crackling wood—the white face with the grey hair above and round it, I thought I was safe; coincidence had not worked so far and so tortuously. Then, as I moved nearer to Frau Gotthold, she turned towards me and I saw her more clearly. Her eyes and her lips were old, but the white skin was unwrinkled and the contours of her chin and throat were firm and even. Perhaps it was that, perhaps her figure, perhaps something else which told me that she was not an old woman.

I had to speak then.

"I am very sorry to trouble you," I said. "I have only come to perform a duty which was laid on me a long time ago. I have been unable to fulfil it before this——"

She interrupted me: "You are not Dutch. You are English. I can tell by your accent."

"Yes," I answered, "I am English. Your servant made a mistake."

"Yes," she repeated, "I knew you were English directly you came in. I know the English well. I have lived in England—a long time ago."

She stared hard at me for a few moments while I fumbled in my pocket for the letter. Then her eyes began to wander.

"I can't see you very well," she said, and I thought her voice was frightened. "It's so dark in here. We have to keep the shutters closed because there are ruffians outside. We're never safe for a moment here. Nearly every day we hear the machine-guns."

"Things must settle down presently," I said.

She laughed, a queer, cracked little laugh.

"Settle down? All my life people have been talking to me about settling down."

"Things are bound to get better," I said quickly, altering my phrase as if I had made a false step.

"Oh yes," she said, "things are bound to get better. Things can't go on as badly as they are doing at present." Her tone was quite normal now, and she went on speaking unself-consciously. "I didn't know it would be like this when I came here. People in Berlin told me that Birnewald was a dangerous place; they said there had been riots and fighting in the streets. But I thought they had read all that in the newspapers, which are always wrong, and besides, there was always fighting in Berlin. I saw a man killed, just as he was going into a café. I couldn't stand Berlin any longer; I always hated it and the only person I still cared for was here, at Birnewald. That's what I thought. She didn't reply to my letters, but I thought she might be ill, or that her replies were lost. Everything gets lost now." She paused, and then repeated: "Everything gets lost. . . . But I'm not going back to Berlin."

I supposed that for weeks she had had no friend to talk to, no one but the unsophisticated Konrad. If I had sat still she would, I believe, have told me more of her story, for she seemed to have lost all reticence. I was curious to hear that story, but my nervousness would not let me wait for it.

With an impromptu opening I said: "Your brother-in-law gave me your address in Berlin, and——"

"Ernst? Yes, he is much better than the rest of the Gottholds."

I rushed on: "—and to make certain that it was delivered I came here to bring you this letter——"

"A letter?"

She took the letter from me, broke it open with her finger and fumbled at her waist for her spectacles.

"I haven't got my spectacles," she said. "It's so dark, I can't read without my spectacles." Then, turning her head: "Klaus, you must read this letter for me."

He had been in the room all the time, crouched in a corner underneath the window, and I had not seen him. I jumped in my chair when I heard him say "Yes, Mother." He stood up, came forward a pace or two and stood in the middle of the room so that the light reflected from the high side-window fell on his face.

He was a tall boy, and in that uncertain light I could not guess his age. He would have been very big for thirteen, for seventeen much too boyish, but even these ages I would not have quoted dogmatically as the limits of possibility. His figure was that of a youngster preposterously overgrown, broad, lanky, spiderish, flat in the chest; a skeleton roughly padded out towards the shape of a man. His face, too, was bony, with prominent cheek-bones and the eyes deep-pitted—mysterious eyes. I noticed by a faint glistening that a moustache was beginning over a child's mouth. I could not tell, in that first glimpse, whether it was a cruel face or only frightened. Everything about the boy seemed as if designed to supplement the enigma of his mother—an old-young woman with a young-old son; and this was the fact that would have been foremost in my mind if another had not seized it. Before I had even remarked the features (or so it seemed) I recognized the boy's face. It was my father's.

He hardly looked at me as he went to his mother's side.

"A letter, Mother?" he said.

"Yes. I want you to read it to me."

In my anxiety I took a step forward so that I came between them.

"I think it is not a letter that you would care to have read aloud," I said. "It would be better for you to read it when I have gone."

Not knowing how to take my leave I moved towards the door awkwardly, like a child who has been scolded. But I did not quite reach the door.

"Tell me," Frau Gotthold commanded with a complete change

in her voice. "Tell me! what is this letter? Who is it from? How do you come to have it?"

"It is from your husband," I answered. "He gave it to me to send you just before he died. I would have——"

She was gazing at me intently, and with a little shake of her head as if to bring her thoughts together, she asked: "Then you are—then you are the Colonel Saggard who wrote to me?"

I nodded.

"Then you are the man who killed my husband?"

Her voice was quiet and practical.

"That is not a question I can answer directly," I replied. "If you remember what I said in my letter——"

But she was not listening to me. She still looked at me, but not at my face, only at my body. It was Klaus, standing beside her who looked at my face.

"I suppose," she said, "that if I had ten more husbands you would get rid of them somehow for me. If you couldn't hide them you would——"

"Hedwig, you are not thinking," I said. "If you would——"

For the first time she got up from her chair.

"Get out!" she ordered. "Get out! Go away from here!"

A man of common sense would have gone straight away, but I stood irresolute for just a second, and she began to laugh. I could not go then. I meant to speak to her again, to explain about everything, about myself, about Heinrich, directly she stopped laughing. But her laugh went on, rising higher and wilder, until she slipped back into her chair and threw back her head and laughed and laughed again, peal after peal, shriek after shriek, the four walls echoing with her frenzied hilarity. Klaus watched her, puzzled, until a frightened look came to his face. Bending over, he said "Mother! Mother!" But she would not stop laughing. I had realized before he did, and I had her by the arms now, shaking her. Suddenly he turned on me.

"Get out of here!" he roared. "Get out!"

I hardly looked at the child who was interfering. "One minute," I said absently, working Hedwig's arms up and down. "Do keep away. I can get her round."

Before I realized that he had moved he gave me such a blow on the mouth that I reeled backwards. For a second I could not speak.

"Look here!" I said.

"Get out!"

"One minute——"

"Get out! Get out!"

He rushed to the door and flung it open. Before I could get back to his mother he was between us again, and as I hesitated he pitched all his weight into me, raining blows on my face and chest. I grasped his wrists and held him writhing, but he was on the point of apoplexy and I let him go, pushing him back as I did so. There was nothing for it. I went to the door.

Klaus fell heavily against the wall, but he took the main shock with his soft parts—his head did not touch—and he bounded forward, first to his mother, then after me. As I reached the door a tremendous kick on my buttocks drove me full tilt into Konrad.

"Get out!" Klaus shrieked again.

Konrad held me for a moment and then, pushing me on one side, strode into the room. Well, I could leave it to him—he would know. I went slowly downstairs holding my handkerchief to my face which was streaming with blood. I should have to think out a story for the sentries at the barrier, I reflected. I slipped out of the front door and down the steps. Hedwig's shrieks followed me all down the road, and Klaus's furious dismissal was still in my ears.

I did not leave Birnewald till the following evening. That was the fault of the railway service; I did no sightseeing, for I had seen sights enough to content a more ambitious tourist on my walk back from Krugenstrasse—sights which come in an invalid city as the daylight goes; but I used my time not unprofitably, for I found Bennett Williams.

In this way: I had made my calculations carelessly when I left Berlin and was very short of ready money. The chance seemed unlikely, but I asked Frau Zuckermann if she knew of anywhere that I could cash a traveller's cheque, preferably into mixed English and German money. It was some time before I could make her understand me, as traveller's cheques were outside her experience; then she could only tell me that no English money could be got in Birnewald, and as to German—well, it might be of some value, but you didn't know from one day to another; if I wanted to buy anything, a spare pair of trousers would be more likely to be accepted. I thought, with a sigh, that between Birnewald and civilization I should have to go practically without meals. After she had taken away the tray, however, the old lady came back. An idea had struck her. She had noticed a shop with a foreign name on it, not far away, in a little street just off the square. It had only been opened a few weeks back, and someone had told her that the owner was an Englishman. I might

try there and see if they would do anything for me. But I had better slip in without being noticed if possible. People didn't very much like a man who went into an English shop; even if he were obviously a Dutchman, she added.

I had no difficulty in finding the "shop"—it was a branch of the Chicago United Trust Bank. The door was locked, but when I knocked I was admitted into the office where Bennett Williams was sitting reading the *Tageblatt* at an empty table.

"Sol!" he said, "at last we have a grand onrush of customers."

I liked the man at once. Mentally I have always made an arbitrary division of Americans into three kinds: those I meet anywhere between Boston and Los Angeles, who with all their diversity seem to have the common characteristics of sturdiness, friendliness, and strong national feeling (by which I do not mean patriotism); those I meet travelling in Europe who with their opulence and philistinism are even more provoking than the fellow-countrymen whom one seems always to find abroad, the type that is too national to suffer transportation and that blossoms on a strange soil into extravagant vulgarity; and last, the American living in Europe—not in England—who is the home-found product quickened and magnified into a character which I describe, for want of a contemporary epithet, as Grecian. Grecian is not a good adjective, for its connotation is too particular; but I am still seeking for a phrase that will describe the cool sophistication, the intensified friendliness, the magnetic temperament of the native of Chicago or Philadelphia that I find in a little flat, American furnished, in Brussels and Rome and Vienna, even in Saratov.

These are hardly defensible generalizations, and if I should write a work on group-character (which God forbid!) I should not be so foolhardy; but they are good enough as a rough summary of my own experience, made homogeneous by time imposed on memory, and I cannot write of Bennett Williams without allowing myself a little burst of untempered enthusiasm for a group of friends that he represents. In time he takes only a very small portion of this history, or in any other I could write, for on this occasion I was only with him for an hour or two and I have only seen him on one occasion since, when we had a glass of beer together at Waterloo just before he caught his train for Southampton. They are all like that, known for a few hours and liked and gone for ever, and perhaps the best tribute I can give is that though I have forgotten many of the names I still feel that I know them so well. Perhaps I remember Williams better than the others because it was in Birnewald that I found him; in Birnewald, where I had been for nearly twenty-four hours without

talking to anyone but a frightened old woman and a woman on the borders of insanity and a soldier who had not thought it worth while to mention that he was still close to starvation. I doubt if I should have been gladder or more surprised had I come across him in the heart of Thibet.

Our business was done very quickly. Money? Why yes, any sort I liked, he had a safe full, pounds? yes!—dollars or pesetas if I wanted them. It was grand, he told me, to do a bit of business; at present his work occupied about two hours in the course of the week.

"Well, someone has to be here," he said. "Nothing doing at present, but the boys'll be along presently, you see if they aren't. A couple of bagmen first, and then there'll be some fellow with the telescope eyes who'll see these factories all standing idle and before you can say 'bang' he'll be turning out boots or sausages or automobiles from one of them. So I have to be here ready. That's our service—wherever you go and want some money to pay out to the boys, there we are, all ready with it as soon as you've put your name on the cheque. We've got a branch at the North Pole, been there waiting for business these last thirty years, and another down the crater of Vesuvius. There'll be a fellow wanting money down there one day. That's the C.U.T."

"But it's bad luck on you," I said, "being stuck away in this God-forsaken hole. I can't think how you live——"

"Mm, it's bad," he agreed, "I don't mean for me, I'm all right. I can sit about and read the books I brought with me and play auction with an imaginary partner and two imaginary opponents. That's all right—it's a rest-cure, just what I wanted after my last job, which between you and me wasn't banking. Food? Well, I scrape it up like a hen scratches for the maize, and I don't mind telling you that some of the packages that come down here from Berlin—oh, no, not more than half of them are lost—some of those packages with the C.U.T. label contain a bit extra besides the very important documents. They're nearly all full of business papers, you understand, grand financial stuff like the *Gaiety Gossip* of Philadelphia, but right in the middle there's sometimes a small bit of rabbit in a can. No, I tell you what it is makes me sore with this city. I sit in my room upstairs eating my canned rabbit with the blinds drawn down, and maybe I look round the corner of the blind just a minute, just curiosity, and I see a dame lying down dead on the side-walk. Shot? No, not so lucky. Just thought she could go round to see her boy-pal who's posted out to snipe the folk that are getting a bit rowdy, and she hasn't had anything to put inside for four days, and there's two that needs it

maybe, and the weather's a bit colder than it has been, and she gets so far, and that's all she can do. Oh, they've got everything organized now—if the Germans can't organize, who can? This newspaper here, it says that Birnewald is quite quiet and orderly now and relief measures all working admirably. Well, that's quite right. She's not been lying there more than ten minutes when two men come along from nowhere with a little cart. Pop her on, off she goes, buried somewhere, no litter."

He rolled the little story easily off his tongue, glib and pat; but I noticed, for I have rather the habit of watching men's faces, that the muscles of his jaw were very taut while he was speaking. When he finished he swung his eyes to meet mine and smiled faintly. "Perfect organization," he repeated. And then, suddenly letting go the words he had held fast for a second behind his lips: "My God! we did a bloody fine bit of business when we won that war, you and me. What do you say, Mr. Saggard?"

I said—it was all I could say—"Well, them or us——"

"Ye'," he said, and shut his mouth. Presently he went on again, as if starting a new subject. "When I got here, there was a big bunch of men just got back. Oh, a couple of thousand I should think, perhaps not so many. I don't know where they came from, somewhere a hell of a way off, I fancy. They'd been skirmishing about in the forests, right over on the east side, and someone had told them that the war was over and they'd decided they might as well go home. Mighty glad they were to be home, too. Some of them hadn't seen their families for three years or more. Well, the celebrations didn't last very long, because you can't go on celebrating on smiles and kisses and nothing else. They weren't long in looking around for work. Well, there was just one factory working, or half-working, and when they went around there it was soon made pretty clear to them that if they didn't move along quick it wasn't much good to them their having dodged the Russians. So there they were, time on their hands. Well, at last, two fellows came along from Berlin—Poles, I think they were, very obliging fellows the Poles—and said they'd get one of the factories going. They had the boodle, they said. Well, no one stopped to ask them what sort of boodle—they'd got nice new overcoats and skin shoes and all the outfit, looked the part anyway. Paper fans, they said they were going to make. Japanese paper fans that they had a hunch they could sell to a guy in Copenhagen. They signed on about three hundred men—it was a beginning, anyway, and they got some paper from somewhere—oh yes, they were smart those two boys—and they got the machinery rigged up, adapting some of the old stuff and bringing in some new.

Everyone lent a hand, glad to do it. End of the first week—first full-running week, that is—they paid all the men prompt as Peter, about one dollar fifty, which was what they'd agreed on. There wasn't anything much they could buy with the money, but that wasn't the fault of the Polish gentry, no one could say that. Well, before long a letter came through from the fellow in Copenhagen. He was very sorry, but his customers hadn't known before that the fans came from Birnewald. They'd kidded themselves they were all made in San O Tan. And they weren't at all keen, seeing how the Kaiser had behaved not long back, to buy Birnewald fans. Perhaps if the price could come down a bit they might be got to think about it again. And anyway the manufacturers must be a bit more prompt with deliveries, even if there wasn't any railroad service to speak of. So at the end of the next week Brother Pole put just fifty cents in each envelope. That was when the price of meat and vegetables had just doubled twice in two days. Well, that might have been all right, if someone hadn't seen the two Polish gentry going out of the back entrance to the works in a nice new auto they'd got from somewhere. There was plenty of gas in the auto and they used it for the factory and the Poles." He took out his cigarette-case and lit a Camel. "That's how things go around here. Things 've always been like that, ever since I've been here."

He told me more about Birnewald, more than I do or want to remember. And I gave him what news I could of other parts in exchange. He was anxious to know whether the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race had been started again now, and if so who had won, and whether the Duke of Winchelsea had got his divorce yet.

My time with him was not wasted (even had it been possible in those circumstances to waste time in any proper sense of the phrase) for he solved the difficulty that had been bothering me since the evening before, that of getting money through to Hedwig. There were many complications, the uncertain value of a local currency being not the least. Williams found a way through everything. The payments could be supposed to come from a special fund for assisting war widows, possibly a fund started by wealthy and generous American citizens of German origin; that would provide a plausible reason for administration through an American bank, and would enable Williams to deliver the payments—in currency or in useful goods—himself. If that story failed and the money was refused he would make up another one. No, he didn't mind the walk; everyone knew by now that he didn't carry negotiable money about and that he was equipped with

an automatic if they thought of looking again. (The automatic? a matter of having a ticket; he had coaxed a ticket out of everybody who meant anything and forged some others as a standby; oh, he was safe enough—didn't mind where he went.) All I had to do was to pay in to the branch in King William Street; and we left it at that.

He came to the station to see me off and fussed about my comfort on the journey. Had I been his twin brother he could not have done more for me. And as the train moved off he gave a huge American handshake—more like a cuddle than a convention—and went back to his little office in the Bismarckstrasse to play cards with himself until the business men came.

As far as Flangenbirtz—eight hours—I had as foul a journey as I had expected. The carriage was full of soldiers; at least, they were in military uniforms. They had no tickets, but having heard that there was some work and food at Flangenbirtz they had made up a party and boarded the train. The guard—a man of the old school—told them that it was *verboten* to travel without tickets, but there was no argument. One of them had a half-starved dog with him—I can't think why. I was born in a gracious and reticent reign, so I leave the stink undescribed. We arrived at Flangenbirtz at between two and three in the morning, and I spent the rest of the night in the station.

For the good name of the travel-office clerk I mentioned earlier I must record the fact that from Flangenbirtz my journey was as comfortable as anyone but an elderly spinster could have demanded. A long train with a fine locomotive swung into the station like a bishop a-slumming, Mitropa coaches and all, shabby inside and out, but with nearly all the proper fixings. I sat with a very intelligent journalist who had just come (alive and unscathed) from Moscow, and who prophesied that within twenty years a phoenix would rise from those ashes to make New York look *petite* and old-fashioned. I don't know why he thought so—his descriptions left me vague on this point—but the next thing to being God is working in Fleet Street, so I did not ask too many questions. A young lady opposite us, very fashionably dressed, was talking about an order from Wertheim—a line of evening gowns—to be confirmed as soon as the currency settled down. We took luncheon in the restaurant car. The meal was very well cooked and nicely served. And with only two stops the train pelted over patched up bridges and embankments through the scorched and sickled landscape until we got to Ostend.

I crossed the next morning, over a flat, sunlit sea. I walked down the gangway into a quiet and pleasant Dover. The fly-sheets were all at boiling-point over something—a lock-out of women workers in Sheffield I think it was—but everyone had had time to read the morning papers now and that was all past history. In any case the sun was very warm and bright, and my tobacco, for some unknown reason, had gone down a halfpenny. It was being hinted, on the quay and in the railway carriage, that things were worse than they looked, even on Shakespeare's island; there had been a grand scrapping of surplus men and material, but somehow there still wasn't room for replacements. Some people said the women were the trouble; a market gardener I spoke to was quite sure of it. At all events, the daily newspapers had the trouble well in hand. Their schemes were all made out, cut and dried to the last details, and before long they were going to put in a new government to carry them out. The sandbags had been taken away from the Abbey and the Post Office, and above the brewery which stood as from time immemorial against the grey river the Union Jack was flying. Everything was being organized.

As for Birnewald, it had passed into unreality. The sun that shone upon Grosvenor Gardens, still gaining in warmth and splendour, would have melted such a place away; and there too, remote as it was from Marble Arch, the new organization was beginning. All the mess was going to be cleared up now. Had not Bennett Williams himself told me that the business man would be there before long, and with him the opening of a new prosperity? A few more might starve before that time came; a few more frantic men would try to rush the barrier into the high-class suburban quarter, where all was wealth and plenty, and would be picked off, most of them by the machine-gun that stood always on the roof of the coalhouse just down the road; a few more women would grow desperate and be found inside a garden fence with the yard of clothes-line by which they had escaped; the roads, when the rain came again, would get a bit worse still, and for a while the sallow houses in the Bismarckplatz would stand frowning and empty. But someone had to pay a little for the luxury of warfare; and in the end the business man would come.

I was ahead of my time, and as I had sent off a telegram from Dover I should be home just half an hour before tea and toasted scones were ready for me. There was time for me to call in at my bank on the way and arrange for the small transfer of funds. Having done that, and with the letter at last delivered, I could forget that affair completely. After all, it was not my business. I had known the woman's husband. We had met professionally—too professionally.

And by a queer chance I had met the woman herself, long years before, almost in her childhood. It was an interesting freak of circumstance that we should have renewed our acquaintance. But that was over now. She lived a long way off, and we were still an island, thank God, despite Blériot.

"The last part was splendid," I answered Peggy, with my mouth full of buttered toast, "not a hitch the whole way." But I wondered whether Hedwig was still laughing, with the frightened boy staring at her. That laughter was still in my ears, ringing and pealing; and clearer still, more insistent, more penetrating, more intolerable Klaus's voice—"Get out! Get out!"

V

I INTENDED, the thermometer having leapt overnight from zero to seventy, to run out to Marlow and see Dick Holt. He had been there for a year or more, in a cottage which he described as "created by God's hand before the soil upon which it rests" (this on the back of a picture-postcard which showed two fat women bathing). But I had been forced so often to put off the visit that I felt the fates were against me, and when the telephone buzzed I almost knew that someone was going to steal my afternoon. I laid down the file of serious documents entrusted to me and took up the receiver. There was the noise of many winds and mighty waters, then the voices of two or three subscribers, some faint, some feminine. I guessed that it was Charles who had brought this chaos into operation, for his personality had that effect on the telephone system; and presently, as the storms and whispers died away, his voice took shape, first faintly, then suddenly stentorian.

"Hullo! Hullo! I say! I say! I say!"

I waited till he grew short of breath, and then, in my most womanly voice, I answered: "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

"I say!" he shouted, "who's that? I want to speak to Mr. Saggard. Is Mr. Saggard there?"

I said: "Charles darling, don't you remember how our dear mother used to tell us that a loud voice is the sign of ill-breeding."

"Oh, is that you John? Is that Mr. Saggard? Is that you? Well, why couldn't you say so? I say, old man, I'm in a fix; can you help me out?"

"Yes," I replied. "You will find that the mouthpiece of your instrument is hinged; if you turn it upwards so that it faces your mouth and then speak in low tones——"

"Oh, shut up! Look here, I've got to get a team out this afternoon to meet Major Wannett—you know Wannett, don't you?—and I'm no less than three men short."

"Ah yes?"

"He always turns out a good side, and last time—just before the war—they beat us, so we simply must whack them this time."

"Yes, you must," I agreed.

"Well, look here, do you think you could turn out for us?"

"What do you mean?" I asked densely.

"Can you come and play for us?"

"What game is this?"

"Cricket, you ass!"

"I don't play cricket."

"That doesn't matter. We always have a lot of cross-eyed cripples playing."

"Thanks," I said, "but I don't want to take part in this sport."

"But why not?"

"In the first place I have always regarded the game as childish, in the second——"

"Look here, you must come!" he insisted. "Bring Peggy. She'd enjoy it."

"There's nothing she hates more than seeing her husband make a fool of himself——"

But I gave in in the end. Poor old Charles!—I could see that it was life and death to him. He told me where the game was, and the time. "Don't be late if you can help it!" he admonished, sure of me now. "I can't get away from the Ministry till three," I said. "Nonsense!" he roared, "if you left this minute you wouldn't be leaving any work undone." He had the last word.

I decided to make the afternoon as pleasant as possible and I got on to Lanair. "Lanair," I said, "would you like to come and watch me playing cricket this afternoon?"

"Oh, my God!" he answered.

"Well, would you?"

"No, why should I? What is this game cricket?"

"I don't know," I told him, "I'm going to find out. My brother plays it. He's dragged me in."

"Where are you playing, anyway?"

"Stand-off half," I said.

"Don't exercise your callow wit on me. Where is this infernal game being played?"

I told him—a place in Hertfordshire.

"And how do I get there?" he asked.

"I'm no snob," I said. "I'll take you in my car."

"Is that the same machine as you took me to Folkestone in last month?"

"The same."

"Oh, my God!"

"Well, will you come?"

"I won't help you change the wheels when they go phut."

"I won't ask you to."

"Is your wife going with you?"

"Probably."

"All right, I'll come."

"Peggy will be flattered."

"I only meant that I couldn't stand your company alone all the way into Hereford. It was Hereford you said?"

"No, Gloucester."

"Yes, I'll come," he said finally, "if you let me talk to your wife while you operate the controls."

I left the office early to have time for a decent luncheon. Peggy was pleased with the proposal, and I gained credit for inviting Lanair. "But you haven't any things to play in," she said.

She was wrong about that, but we had a hunt to find them. For twenty minutes we excavated in trunks filled to overflowing with clothes that were too good to give away and too old-fashioned to command a price, tremendous overcoats, college blazers, a morning coat I had worn gloriously in the days of King Edward, an opera hat, service jackets, court breeches, clothes sacred to gardening; until we had unearthed a pair of cream-coloured flannel trousers, a white cotton shirt, and a pair of gym-shoes. The trousers were moth-eaten, but not in the most important places, and Peggy rapidly darned them. She had no wool of exactly the right colour, but I thought the general effect would be good enough for Hertfordshire; I discountenanced her suggestion that I should buy new trousers.

We were a quarter of an hour late when according to arrangements we met Lanair at the bottom of Primrose Hill. He was dressed in a dark blue suit, with a starched collar, black tie, black shoes, and a bowler hat.

"Major Lanair, you look perfectly ridiculous," my wife said.

He ignored her. "Is this your car?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I recognize it," he said bitterly.

My wife persisted. "Those are not the sort of clothes to watch cricket in," she said.

"They are," he replied, "exactly the sort of clothes in which to watch your husband play cricket."

"Well, get in and stop talking," I said.

We abused him all the way to Tally Ho Corner. We abused his clothes, his shoes, his cheap little cigar, and his hat, particularly his hat. I said it was common. My wife begged him to take it off. And he answered us by tilting it on to one side of his head. When we had done he insulted us. He said that my cricket clothes were old-fashioned, and that he hoped none of his friends would see

him in my car. He disliked the Great North Road. He maintained that even if the day was really warm he found it cold owing to the inadequacy of my windscreen. The scenery bored him. He thought my driving was dangerous. He asked a dozen times why he had been so nitwitted, or so good-hearted, as to come with us. Each time we rounded a bend and a new stretch of road appeared he sighed deeply, murmured again and again, addressing the bottom button of his waistcoat, "I'm willing to bet there won't be any beer."

When we had left the main road I lost my way twice. On the first occasion Lanair was lengthy in his sarcasm. On the second, he got out of the car and said that he would find his way to the nearest railway station. "I've so enjoyed the run," he said mournfully, and before we could stop him he was limping down a cart-track. After scrutinizing the map for some time we found which road we wanted. I turned the car round and started off again. Lanair followed at a jog-trot, waving his arms. We moved on slowly, enjoying him in the windscreen.

It proved, as it proves so often, that we had been hard by our destination. A quarter of a mile from where we had stopped we came to the entrance to a drive and from Charles's description I knew that it was the one we wanted. We ran up an avenue of beeches, Lanair trotting wearily behind us, and with our running footman so quaintly positioned we drew up between the manor and the great lawn.

The game was just going to begin, and the players were clustered under a mulberry, some putting on pads. Charles saw us and came over, bringing Wannett with him.

"How are you, Peggy?" he said. "You know Major Wannett? Hullo, John! Wannett won the toss and he's going to bat."

Wannett, a long, odd creature with an elliptical face, had already got his pads on.

"I think it's going to keep up," he rumbled.

"What an ideal place this is," Peggy said.

"Nice old place!" Wannett agreed.

"I'm sorry about my gear," I said to Charles.

"Never mind, I thought you'd look still worse. Who's that, or don't you know?"

He pointed to Lanair, who, having stopped when we did, had taken off his hat and was now squatting upon it, motionless.

"That's my old batman," I said loudly, "he follows me everywhere."

I led Charles towards him.

"This is my brother. This is Major Lanair, of whom you've heard."

Lanair rose and addressed Charles.

"You're his brother?" he asked, pointing to me. "Well, you look a decent body all the same."

Charles looked at me inquiringly.

"Shell shock," I whispered.

He nodded sympathetically and turned to Lanair.

"Do you play cricket?" he asked.

"In the winter evenings."

"I mean, would you play for us? We're still one man short."

"There's nothing I enjoy more than a game of cricket," Lanair said.

"Don't let him!" I begged.

But Charles would not listen.

"Splendid," he said, "I'll see if I can borrow some clothes for you."

He ran away into the house, and Lanair and I walked on to join the others.

"Look here, Lanair," I protested, "you know perfectly well you can't play cricket."

"Neither can you," he retorted.

"But I can make a pretence."

"I couldn't look more foolish than you're going to."

"Look here, I brought you here, and I'm responsible for your behaviour——"

"And you're the liar who's just said that I've had shell-shock."

"Well, I've got to explain you somehow."

We reached the group under the mulberry, and I introduced Lanair. Names were mumbled and I nodded in all directions. I had met some of the men before. Charles called from the house that he had found some clothes, and Lanair shambled off to change. We put out our cigarettes and took the field. The ladies clapped us, said to each other, "Who's going to begin the bowling?" and forgot all about us. Wannett and his head gardener came in. I bowled Wannett.

We had played three overs before Lanair reappeared from the house. His face was as earnest as that of a schoolboy playing his first match for the House eleven. He had put on a very short pair of white flannel trousers over his blue ones, which were still visible for some six inches above his ankles. The rest of his attire was as before, including the hat, now slightly concave at the summit. "Where do you usually field?" my brother asked him. "I should like to bat, if I may," he said. He was sent to square-leg.

Charles did most of the bowling himself, though he was careful

to give every one of his lads a turn at the other end and occasionally took himself off for one or two overs in case the innings should not last long enough for them all. He took the brunt of the work, not so much because he liked bowling as because it was the surest way of getting rid of the other side. It was all that mattered to Charles, that sunny afternoon when I longed to be bathing in the lake or lying in the deep grass under the chestnuts. He was determined to win. His face bore a look of hardened good humour, but that expression was scarcely enough to mask the intense concentration, the childlike keenness; and his muscles, as he crouched in the slips, were taut with readiness for action. He had forgotten the ladies and the other team chattering together in the shade. He was unconscious of the loveliness of the setting, the strip of smooth green, the quiet lake, the two great banks of trees forming a bold gateway to the stretch of country which ran out in softening shades of colour as far as the Chiltern Hills. He knew nothing except that the ball was falling plumb into Beltock's hands and that Beltock, unless by a miracle, would fumble it.

"Yours, Beltock! Hold it! Oh, bad luck!"

If only his own hands had been there he would have had it—I saw them cupped and clenched in sympathy as the ball fell neatly between Beltock's. But that was all in the game. He grinned heroically, picked up the ball as it rolled to his feet, and threw it to a motor-engineer who was taking the next over. His determination was only increased by the disaster, and as he crouched again he seemed by sheer will-power to be summoning the ball towards him. I felt rather proud of my young brother. He was the only man on the field who was entirely correct in his kit, and I have seen few men who looked better in their whites. His skin was a dark brown, and his hair had retained all its colour and its thickness. His arms, bare well above the elbow, were finely rippled with veins and muscles. I could have drawn his figure in half a dozen lines, one straight across the shoulders, two strokes down to the waist, two or three more for his square, strong buttocks and his straight legs. And every movement he made was the certain, easy movement of an athlete. He was the clean-limbed Briton, the embodiment of everything I had once longed to be; and I could still feel a little glow of secret admiration when I watched him playing games, having laughed at the Englishman he typified for thirty years.

He was the only man on the field who was really in earnest about the game. The rest of us were awake for one ball, asleep for the next. But he was not the only fielder who looked earnest. Lanair stood with his feet close together, his hands held ready in front of his chest, his eyes glued on the wicket; but I am fairly certain that he did not

move either an arm or a leg throughout the entire innings. Charles, wisely I thought, ignored Lanair as sedulously as Lanair ignored the ball when it passed within a foot of his ankles.

The score was being chalked by Wannett's butler on a blackboard which the schoolmaster had brought with him. Charles glanced at it anxiously from time to time, and as he passed me between the overs he whispered "Seventy-five, I'm afraid we shan't touch that." To me, sweating with the sun and wild dashes at uncatchable balls, the middle figure was of more interest. Eight wickets down. And even as I looked I heard another falling. We all (except Charles) pitched ourselves on to the ground. Pressing against my ear my watch ticked steadily, and I was almost asleep when Charles roused us. "Now, on your toes you chaps!" We stumbled to our feet, our eyes blinking painfully as they met the sunshine. A neighbouring squire in the early seventies, sixteen stone all within five feet of the ground, had at last got the top straps of his pads done up and was waddling towards the wicket, followed by a trickle of applause. He manoeuvred himself into position and Charles took the ball. From respect to grey hairs he went back only a pace or two, turned round and sent down a slow one; slow, but dead straight and full of guile. The squire, standing firmly in front of his wicket, stopped it with his pads, then he raised his bat, snipping off the bails as he did so, caught the ball as it bounced from the ground, poked it into the air, lashed out again, and succeeded in lobbing it into the sure hands of mid-on. "Oh, well caught, sir!" Charles yelled, dancing with excitement. "Come on!" roared the squire. He had made half the pitch when the umpire, diffidently intercepting, told him that the match was being adjourned for tea. "Tea? Good!" he said. Throwing down his bat he stumbled after the fieldsmen, leaving only Lanair, solitary and motionless, behind him.

Half a dozen men were already confusing one another with cups and sandwiches, and I went and sat down by my wife. Charles presently brought us tea. "We're going to have our work cut out," he said. "With sugar for you?—I forget." His wife, sitting next to Peggy asked: "Have we won, dear?" "Not yet, dear," he told her, by long experience unoffended. "Tea for you?" to Lanair, who had just arrived. "Thank you," said Lanair, "there is absolutely nothing I like so much as tea." "It's going to be a tussle," I heard Wannett say behind us.

"How are the kids, Dorothy?" I asked my sister-in-law. "Still at school?"

She smiled.

"Ronald's played twice for the second eleven," Peggy said.

"Oh, bravo!" I said to Dorothy.

Lanair produced a doughnut and offered it to Peggy.

"I've saved this for you," he said.

"And where did you learn your cricket?"

It was Doctor Paston, an old friend, who asked me the question.

"I taught him," said Lanair.

I explained Lanair to the doctor.

"I thought it was going to rain," Dorothy said. "Hasn't it kept up wonderfully?"

"The garden wants rain," Mrs. Wannett roared, breaking loose from the scrimmage by the tea-table.

"Rain," Lanair murmured, "where can I find rain?"

"Was your tea all right, Major Lanair?"

"I have never tasted such excellent tea," he answered.

A few feet away the squire had just produced entertainment of the oldest and most infallible kind by dropping himself ponderously on to a cheap deck-chair. He was a great-spirited old man, and refusing all assistance he rolled himself into an upright position and strutted off towards the group at the table. He was unhurt, but the back of his trousers had proved less tough than his bones, and his shirt had taken advantage. His wife ran after him, whispering hoarsely in his ear, but his only retort was to shout back at her: "Nonsense, my love! I tell you I'm not hurt in the least." Mrs. Wannett, rather to my regret, was too much concerned with the total destruction of the chair to notice any shortcoming in the squire's personal appointment. The village youths in both teams, who had segregated themselves from the gentry, wisely turned their backs until they could get their faces under control. Lanair glanced at the squire and went on eating a sandwich. Paston talked hard to Dorothy, his mouth half-full of cake. I took Peggy by the arm and led her away, keeping her out of sight until she showed evidence of better breeding.

When we returned we found that Charles was still being civil to Lanair, as a good clergyman should.

"When would you like to bat?" he was asking, "or don't you mind?"

He was plainly hoping for a satisfactory answer to the second question, but Lanair would take no such hint, and glanced at his watch.

"At twenty minutes to five," he replied.

"You mean," said Charles, "you would like to go in first."

"Before or afterwards, just as you please."

"Send the man in when convenient," I said.

Charles decided to get the trouble over.

"All right!" he said, "you come in first with me. Do you mind getting your pads on at once. We may want all the light there is."

"Oh, are you playing a second innings?" Mrs. Wannett asked, as her husband led out his side.

"Yes," said Peggy, saving me, "they weren't quite satisfied with the first."

I arranged a deck-chair and Mrs. Wannett sat down between us.

"You're sure you've fixed it safely?" she asked. "People are so careless with deck-chairs. Sir Lawrence should have known better—that's the third that's been broken this month."

Charles was advancing into the field, swinging his bat, with Lanair trotting pathetically at his side. They both arrived at the same wicket and Charles obligingly crossed over to take Wannett's bowling.

"And what was it I heard about your going to Germany?" Mrs. Wannett asked. "Your brother told us——"

"A business trip," I said. "Just two or three days."

"Difficult at all?" Paston asked.

He was standing behind my chair with his eyes on the field. Mrs. Wannett, I could see, was mutely objecting to his pipe.

"Not particularly," I said.

Charles hit two fours off the second and third balls.

"Well I'm sure that's the last place I ever want to go to," Mrs. Wannett said. "Would you like to, Mrs. Saggard?"

"Oh, I'm sure I shouldn't," Dorothy answered.

"In some ways, yes," my wife said.

"Oh! in what ways?"

"Well, I think one ought to see things."

Mrs. Wannett could make nothing of the remark.

"Did you see any signs of real humility?" she asked me.

I hesitated, and I was comforted to hear Paston's tongue give a little click behind me.

"Well, we've survived one over, in spite of your husband's bowling," Peggy said quickly.

"Oh, is my husband bowling? No, no, that's Mr. Fennamore."

Charles had left the three last balls alone, and I watched intently to see how Lanair would shape for the ordeal. He was standing to attention, a foot outside his crease, holding his bat at the height of his shoulders. He had not put on any pads. Fennamore sent down a fast, short ball which bumped up dangerously. Lanair just touched it with his bat and it rolled between the slips "Come on!" Charles roared and Lanair, to my amazement, bounded clumsily down the pitch.

"Good Lord!" said Paston, "your friend's made a run."

"What was that?" Mrs. Wannett asked, "a run?"

"Sixty-seven still to make," said Peggy.

But Mrs. Wannett, after the brief diversion, swooped back to Germany.

"Do you know, I heard the other day that one of the weekly newspapers is talking about forming a society for encouraging friendship between children in Germany and England."

We left the remark in silence until Dorothy said "Fancy that!"

"After all our boys did and suffered!" Mrs. Wannett added.

Paston said: "Did you have any trouble about passport and so forth? I suppose not, being one of His Majesty's tame civilians."

"And they say that one of the bishops has actually supported it," Mrs. Wannett pursued. "I do think it will be dreadful if the Church of England gets led into idealism; I mean of course the wrong sort of idealism. I'm sure your husband would agree with me."

Dorothy, to whom this last sentence had been administered, said: "What Charles is so keen about is keeping up a spirit of manliness."

As if to illustrate her words Charles let fly at a loose ball, slightly mistimed it, and sent it straight into the hands of cover-point.

I looked at the score-board and saw the butler chalking up "36 1 19." So Charles had only made 19, and allowing for byes—Sir Lawrence was keeping wicket but he had the support of a long-stop—Lanair must have made at least a dozen runs. I had been so much occupied in preparing non-committal replies for my hostess's next questions that I had been paying no attention to the game. So Lanair still had surprises for me!

"Stupid of me!" said Charles, much chastened, as he squatted at his wife's feet. "Sheer carelessness! Your friend's having luck."

"Do I ever let you down?" I asked modestly.

"Give Beltock a clap!" Charles said.

We applauded Beltock, and leaving the ladies to advance the conversation, which in playtime is their particular art, I concentrated on the cricket. Lanair's method of getting runs was certainly interesting. He did not hit a single ball; to the naked eye, at a distance of eighty yards, his bat did not appear to move; but by some accident every ball that approached the wicket (Wannett and two other bowlers were consistently achieving this standard) came into contact with his bat and rolled to an empty part of the field; and Lanair, without haste or apparent purpose, trotted up the pitch. Beltock was smiting lustily at everything that rose sufficiently to be smitten. It was a four, if not a six, when he did hit it. But he only succeeded in hitting an average of one in an over, and run for run Lanair was scoring at the same pace.

Sixty was up when fate ceased to be kind to Beltock, and Patterson

was sent in to replace him. Patterson scored a one and gave Lanair the bowling. Lanair took another run off the last ball of the over, and then, from the other end added one more. Patterson was bowled, and two more wickets fell in the same over. Charles began to look anxious. He sent in his organist, who hit two lusty fours and then broke his own wicket. Lanair made a run. Wannett took a wicket.

"You now," Charles said, fixing the bottom straps of my pads. "Do your best, old man! You must keep our end up!"

His excitement was so great that I was almost infected by it. I was determined not to let the dear fellow down if I could help it, and I felt quite nervous as I took the batting-gloves from the outcoming batsman and went in. From the other end Lanair watched me owlishly. To show Charles that I was taking the business seriously I asked the umpire for centre, stamped on one of the larger rises in the ground, and patted my crease with deliberation. Wannett surveyed me with a critical eye and beckoned his whole field closer; it was an insult, I suppose, but at the time I felt quite honoured by these special attentions, and as the slips gathered round me like chicks round their mother-hen my nervousness increased. At last Wannett consented to bowl. With a short run he sent down an easy ball, a sporting lead to let me feel my hands; it was slow, quite straight, pitched very short, and it rose beautifully. I opened my shoulders and drove at it with a powerful and stylish stroke. Had my bat just touched it it would have gone for a six. I went back to the mulberry tree.

"Sorry, Charles!" I said.

There was a hue and cry for the last batsman. We could find no one who had not batted, and Charles could not think who his last man was. "One of the choirboys, I think it was," he said doubtfully. "I was certain I had eleven, with you and the other idiot." At last the missing player was found, on the field disguised as an umpire, and I was sent to take his place. While the choirboy ran to find a bat, Charles, pale with suspense, came out to speak to Lanair.

"I say, old chap," I heard him whisper, "if you can put just a bit more power into your next two or three strokes, and run two each time, I think we may just do it."

Lanair seemed puzzled.

"More power?" he asked.

"More vim," said Charles.

"You mean, hit the balls harder?"

"Yes, that's it."

Lanair smiled stupidly and nodded.

"Harder!" he murmured to himself, and then again and again: "Harder, harder!"

But I had little confidence in his power of self-hypnotism when I saw him waiting for the ball, his bat held chest-level as before, his toes turned in a little, his bowler on the back of his head, his mouth agape and foolish. Wannett had thrown the ball to the gardener, a muscular youth who was at this moment starting his run from within a yard or two of the boundary. No doubt he could have made as fast a delivery with only a quarter of the journey, but the show of purposefulness succeeded in making Lanair frightened. He glanced at me with an expression of horror and I thought for a moment that he was going to run away; but as the ball left the bowler's hand, travelling fast enough, he actually ran two paces towards it, raising his bat above his shoulder; caught it full pitch, and with no appearance of special effort sent it far out into the middle of the lake. Another ball was thrown in, and he hit two hard fours. Then a one, giving his partner a chance to face the bowling and to be promptly caught at point.

"Tell me, who is that queer fellow?" Wannett said as we walked off the field together. "I didn't catch his name."

But before I had answered his attention was caught by his wife, who came out to meet him with his sweater.

"Is that the end?" she asked. "Oh, I'm glad, some of the men are getting restless. We shall have to write to Falcon's for some more chairs."

I steered away to find Peggy.

"Isn't he an ass!" she said.

"Mostly," I replied. And Paston, standing close by, winked at me.

I wanted to get hold of Lanair, but Charles was all over him, almost embracing him.

"Do tell me who won," Dorothy whispered in my ear. "Peggy's such a tease, she won't."

"We did," I said.

"Charles did?"

"None other."

"I personally," Sir Lawrence was saying to Mrs. Wannett, "put all my faith in lettuces. When I was a young officer I used to have all my men up—didn't matter who they were—and I used to say: 'How many times a week do you eat lettuce?' And I tell you, Mrs. Wannett, if you could see me in my bath and then see some of my contemporaries in their baths, or if you could see some men who are ten years my senior in their baths——"

Lanair, who had got away from Charles, tugged my coat sharply and pulled me away from the others.

"I say," he whispered, "do you know if there's anywhere in these extravagant premises where one can——?"

"Come on," I said, "we'll see if we can find it somewhere."

He took my arm—to complete my degradation—and we went round by the path towards the lake.

"I'm afraid I never answered your letter," he said, "about that pension business. I haven't forgotten about it, but I doubt if we can do anything. I saw Charteris about it and he agreed with me. He would be quite willing to do what he could—send a note to the War Office in Berlin, or else work through the Embassy there. But they'd only ask us very politely to mind our own business. Of course, no information was sent through at the time—we didn't go in for that kind of courtesy—but even if it didn't leak through they must have guessed what had happened and the name would have been put on to the no-hope list as a matter of routine. That sort of thing can't go wrong—I know, 'cause I know their systems pretty well as thoroughly as I know ours." We turned off into an orchard, where we lit our cigarettes. "No, if your friend's pension isn't getting through it's something wrong with the present machinery. And God alone knows how wrong that is. Honestly I feel that's the only possible explanation, and Charteris agrees with me. How was Berlin when you were there?"

"Quiet."

"You struck it lucky."

"The other place was much too quiet—Birnewald."

"Mm yes," he said. "Birnewald's one of the bad places. They're queer people, and they've been hit dam' hard. For bad luck there isn't another town that can show the same record."

"Or for bravery, perhaps?"

"Or for bravery," he agreed. "Well, I'm sorry I'm such a broken reed. If I thought there was any chance——"

"I didn't think there would be," I said. "I just thought it would be worth asking you, on the off-chance. I'm quite ignorant of that sort of thing, and you can understand why I don't want to leave undone anything that's possible. By the way, have you played cricket before, by any chance?"

"Long, long years ago—for Eton."

"I didn't know that——"

"No?"

"And why in hell have you been buffooning all this afternoon? Peggy and I have been blushing ever since we arrived here."

Lanair drew a pattern on the sky with his cigarette, and rubbed his lips together.

"—In Rome as Rome does," he said.

"But Rome doesn't," I argued.

"Or rather, as Rome is. I always think that the one weak point in 'Alice in Wonderland' is that Alice remains so intelligent throughout. Of course, Lewis Carroll lived before psychology was thought of—thank God. However——"

"But perhaps it's the best thing left in England," I said. "The men's pretty clothes and the self-consciousness and the lack of it."

"No, not the best," he corrected, "only the most romantic. You never choose your words carefully enough. That comes of sloppy thought. I like your brother," he added. "He's not like you."

"He's keen on games," I said.

"No, really?—Well, it's a nice type—so long as it doesn't become vocal. Then it's unsafe."

"Charles is never vocal, except in the pulpit. And there he's safe enough. I don't suppose he's touched on anything controversial since he was ordained."

"Good chap!" Lanair said warmly. "Think what it would save me if you were never controversial! But you know, he's not quite happy. He's been worried about something all this afternoon."

"As to whether he was going to beat Wannett," I said.

"Was that all you noticed? Well——"

We had come in sight of the house again, and there was Charles coming to meet us.

"Peggy sent me to try and find you," he called as he approached. "She thought you'd fallen into the lake."

"Ah, is she worried about me?" Lanair asked. "She may think I'm not warm enough or something. I'll go and ease her mind."

He ran on, leaving Charles and me together.

"I really only came to get away from Mrs. Wannett and Sir Lawrence," Charles said, taking my arm and turning me into a side-path. "They will keep talking about Germany. My lads won't have collected all their things for hours yet, and I can't get away till they do. I say, it was awfully decent of you to come and play."

"Oh, rubbish, I've enjoyed myself."

Perhaps I had. I reflected, with shame, that what had given me most pleasure was Sir Lawrence's adventure with the chair.

"And I'm glad you brought that extraordinary fellow along. It was he who saved us, you know. He's a queer freak, though. How long have you known him?"

"A long time," I said. "He's a rather distinguished soldier."

"I can't think why he didn't hit out earlier. Still, we wanted one really steady man."

He seemed then to be reviewing the whole game in his mind. Like most related people we had little to say to each other, and for some time we walked on slowly in silence.

"Have you seen Mabel lately?" I asked.

"About two months ago."

"How was she—pretty fit?"

"Fit as a fiddle."

Mabel had never been anything but fit. But the light was going now, and the green liquid sky which showed through gaps in the wood ahead of us gave its blessing to silence. The smell of evening was growing stronger, and before long it would be cold, for the sun had not shone so long or fiercely as to leave the night air warm and stagnant. From a hundred yards away the voices of the players still reached us, uninterrupted by any other sound and so clearly that we could catch a word and a sentence, but quietened to make us feel that we had left the world for a space. I was rather tired, for a man in his middle years feels the effort involved by long standing and little rushes and the struggle not to show boredom. With more reason Charles was tired, and at last he looked a little untidy. He walked loosely, with the satisfaction of a man who has tried his muscles keenly and feels them hold him easily under a lesser strain. His hands took the weight of his arms as they rested, wrists bent forward and down in his blazer pockets; his elbows forward. His pipe was in its last three minutes, but the thin, blue smoke had still a little flavour—the last of a pipe that had been a good one—and he managed it with unconscious practised skill, enjoying, economising. We would have to go back in a minute or two, and I wanted to delay it. He wanted to delay it, because the friendship of busy men is made up of moments which are hard to find. And we turned left, for we were walking towards the sweep where the cars were standing. Voices and laughter growing fainter again brought us closer together, and instinctively we moved apart a little, grown men not daring to admit affection. The pipe was out at last, and Charles knocked the bowl against a satyr and put it in his pocket.

"I enjoyed this afternoon," he said.

"And me," I said.

Near enough. I was enjoying the little walk, watching Charles, admiring his easy gait and the effortless way in which he did little things, moving a wheelbarrow out of his way, stooping to pick up a pebble, jumping to pull off a twig from an overhanging bough. He was going to say something else, and I waited for it.

Four paces farther on—"Takes one's mind off things."

"Parish?" I asked,

He was feeling for his pouch. The bowl of his pipe was burning hot, but for something to help his speech he had to fill it again.

"Parish? No, not particularly." He quickened his step to get ahead of me, and then, half-turning suddenly, but without looking directly at me, he said: "I'm one of these mutts who think in anniversaries. I suppose it's a theological habit."

I said: "Possibly——"

"You remember Hedwig?"

"Of course."

"Well, to-day's the anniversary of"—his voice became clipped and matter-of-fact—"the day I—well, a certain event that—marked a stage in the development of our relationship."

Very precise, consciously pedantic.

I cast my mind back, but until I could make a special effort to relate them the order of that year's events remained cloudy in my memory. Besides, it is not the formal dates that remain with lovers themselves.

"I see," was all I could say.

He knew, I think, how difficult it was for me.

"I only mention it," he said awkwardly, "because, you see, one can't talk about that business to Dorothy. She knows, of course, but I couldn't—well, rub it in. That's not the word, but you see what I mean."

"Of course I see."

"I suppose, in a way, that the thing runs round my head more because she doesn't know—I mean, Dorothy doesn't know—doesn't think of there being any particular date, I mean, and that makes me feel there's a queer sort of cork in my mind. Do you see what I mean?"

He was speaking now in the mannered, nervous voice that I associated with his deacon days, using a drawl to cover the gaps in sequence. But I understood what he meant.

"Of course, it's all over now. It belongs to another life. It's only that I feel one ought somehow to pay homage to loyalty—I don't mean loyalty to memory, that's quite different."

We were still further back. He was talking as he had done in his schoolboy years, and I felt that I was nearer than I had been for years to the inner self that he, of all men, guarded so circumspectly.

"Did you ever hear from her?" The question which I had longed all those years to ask slipped from me. It was easy, now that we had entered on the dreaded ground. He was grateful for so casual a question, for he had reached the limits of self-revelation.

"Once," he said. "It was some time afterwards. Nothing

much. Just that she released me—not put like that, but meaning that. She said she was sure it would be better for us to forget each other. She didn't say why——”

He broke off suddenly, and I thought the subject was done with. It was curious, I reflected, how as men we continued to be frightened of what we had tacitly made taboo when we lived under a more sensitive, a less formal code. I was glad we had invaded the tabernacle of silence, but still glad to retreat again on to less holy ground, ground where we could walk more light-heartedly. If we had talked more of Hedwig I should have had to say something which meant humility, and it would have jarred us both—us Englishmen who had played trains together.

But Charles had not quite finished.

“There was one thing she said. She said: ‘I shall have something to remember you by.’ I’ve always wondered what that was. She hadn’t a photograph, I know.”

“It might have been anything,” I answered. “A handkerchief, a book, a diary, or——”

Then we heard Peggy calling us, and we shouted “Coming” and made our way back towards the motor-cars.

* * * * *

Everyone, except those that Charles or I were driving home, had gone, and our wives were pardonably angry with us for straying. They had been making feeble excuses for us to the Wannetts for nearly five minutes, and though Mrs. Wannett is as good-hearted as any hostess I know, her impatience had become apparent. I said that we had just gone through the wood and out into the meadow beyond; that we had heard the yelping of an animal in pain and that after a long search we had found a puppy with its head in a rabbit-wire, which with some difficulty we had released. Everyone except Peggy believed this story, and Wannett, whose men would have set the snare, went so far as to praise us for our mercy to a dumb creature. We all said, more than one of us sincerely, how splendid the afternoon had been, how like the old days. Wannett promised Charles a beating later in the season, when the pitch would be harder. Charles swept his friends and vergers and choirboys into his bulky Overland and squeezed himself into the driver's seat. He and I shook hands, with a grin, saying nothing. They drove away, and with Lanair driving we followed the Vauxhall.

* * * * *

I sat in the back with a rug wrapped tightly round me, and for a time I listened to Lanair and Peggy talking. I could hear their

conversation only in patches; hardly anything of Peggy's words, but a good deal of Lanair's, and he was the principal speaker. He was in a mood of high seriousness, and his voice was coloured with a rich solemnity.

"Yes, the war's had at any rate one good result. It abolished class-distinctions for ever. Consciousness of class could not survive in the trenches, and we have never found that consciousness again. It must be puzzling for you people who stayed at home to know how it came about. But I tell you, many's the time I saw a mere Tommy walk up to a full-blown general and hit him on the shoulder and say 'Hullo, old pal!' That was in France, mind you, with the guns going off in all directions and the aeroplanes swooping overhead. Why, I've seen a Field-Marshal standing at the door of a ballroom—of course it was one of those corrugated-iron ballrooms that we had to make do with in those days—and bowing to his batman and saying 'After you, old sport!' That was the spirit of camaraderie that the war gave us. I remember going up to the Chief of Staff one day and asking him some tactical question, I think it was whether I should send an Army Corps to Spain or to Flanders, and he said 'Ask Sergeant Jones, he's much more of a dab at these things than I am.'"

I re-arranged the rug so that it came over my shoulders and buried myself deeper in the upholstery. Lanair was driving fast, and the wind rushing in through holes in the sidescreens was icy.

"That's exactly what I mean. Apart from the fact that they stood on the other side of the table, and were given their tea in cups made of coarser china, and were more neatly dressed, and more careful about their table manners, you wouldn't have known that those village lads were any different or treated any differently from John or even from me. That's what I mean when I say that the bulwarks which have hitherto kept apart the various grades of society have been rent from the top to the bottom of their foundations like a reed shaken in the wind."

At last I had found a position which was fairly comfortable, and as long as I kept quite still my face was out of the main currents, attacked only by little eddies of coldness, into which the draught subsided as it struck against the hood. The cars going out of town, which passed us in almost unbroken succession, had their headlamps turned on now, and kept throwing us for a second or two into stage-like brilliance, projecting our shadows boldly on to the back of the hood and twisting them round till they faded away, grotesquely extended, on the side of the road. The engine was running very

sweetly, and its gentle purr was broken only by the noise of a loose patch on one of the rear tyres, which flapped intermittently against the macadam with a cluck akin to the noise of a horse's hoofs. My legs were rather stiff, and having got them comfortably settled I relished their stiffness; we were some way from Barnet yet, and there was time to go before I should have to move them. The headlamps swept us with such regularity that they ceased to disturb me. I was drowsy and I closed my eyes. The light, brightening and dimming, had the force to penetrate my eyelids. But the sensation was too often repeated to make me restless.

I wondered whether we had been right in saying that the afternoon had brought back old days. All the time, since I had first caught sight of the white flannels and the coloured blazers, the green lawn and tea laid out under the mulberry, I had felt, unreflectively, that it was a play set on by a master craftsman, matched to the closest shade, perfect in every detail, artistic even in historic feeling; too real to be reality. We had set the pieces in the positions we remembered, and the pieces themselves, outwardly, were not much altered. A beard and a sidewhisker had gone, some measured courtesies, and a foot of petticoat from the brighter pieces. Somewhere in the house a gramophone had been playing, but that had been there, only moulded to the period by a green proboscis, before we had drilled at Bisley; and the voices were the same, the sound of leather on wood, the laughter, even the smell had not changed. Perhaps, after all, my doubts were purely subjective. Charles, surely, had been the same man in the same setting. But with the thought of Charles others came to me, confused and tumbling, mingled with one another in kaleidoscopic patterns and defying orderly arrangements. 'He's been worried about something all this afternoon.' That was Lanair's voice, and Lanair was seldom wrong. He was a man who never seemed to understand himself, perhaps never tried, but other men he knew almost with a woman's understanding. 'Of course it's all over now. It belongs to another life.' That was true, but could Charles or anyone else keep a life and a life so entirely apart? There was the question of loyalty. 'Homage to loyalty.' The image of an image, shadow of a shade. But that was another man's problem, mine only because I had made it for him. We were moving very slowly and stopping every few yards. There were lights and movements all round, and I could now see every detail of Peggy's head and shoulders quite clearly. So we reached Barnet, and as we slowed down again I guessed, not stirring to look, that we were just passing the church. A moment later a new vibration told me that our off wheels were between the tram-lines. The jog was enough to awaken me a little

and my brain emerged one stage from pure passivity. Memory was the great curse of life, I decided, and welcomed the clue for its simplicity; not only in little things, as in recalling every unimportant detail and nothing of final value, but in giving us a great past that we had no room for. The agonies, the boredom and the shameful things stood out as if under an arc-light: where the past was happy it discontented us by towering over our present happiness; and when for a moment we felt that the present was important memory told us that such things had already passed into littleness. The summit of the hill would not seem so desperately far away if a cloud would come between us and the point where we started.

"Personally I think you were very wise in your choice." Lanair's voice, grown louder to combat the traffic of Whetstone, roused me to full consciousness and made me smile at my ingenuous fancies. "I've seen a good deal of life, and I've come to the conclusion that the cleverest men should be reserved for the stupidest women. That's why I'm a bachelor—I haven't yet found a woman stupid enough to suit me. And that's why I think you're much happier with old John at the back there than you would be with a man who understood what you said and argued with you all the time. So you see why I've never asked you to divorce him and marry me. But I do think you might have picked a better driver. If he hadn't let me drive home I'd have walked. Honestly I——"

"Lanair," I said coldly, "when you've finished flirting with my wife perhaps you could find a match for me."

He heaved himself on to one side and struggled to get the box out of his trouser pocket, keeping one hand on the wheel and a watchful eye on the High Street of Finchley.

"I sit in your shabby car," he said, "I allow myself to be taken into the remote and bleak country. I play stupid games to please your snobbish county friends, I drive you safely home, or nearly home," (as he just missed a brewer's lorry) "I entertain your tiresome spouse. In return, you use vulgar words to me and you borrow my matches."

"I'll give you some dinner," I replied.

"The same old stuff, I suppose. Tinned chicken and tough celery."

"Major Lanair, you can drop yourself at Golders Green Station," said Peggy.

But we were past the station before the words were out of her mouth, and in five minutes the coloured lights in Mr. Bateman's chemist's shop shone upon us. If we could choose our memories would this afternoon have a place on the roll? I wondered. Per-

haps. I would leave it out, in case there should not be room for a better memory. The memory of certain good meals, perhaps; for at the moment I was hungry.

Darnette had sensibly lit a fire in our small dining-room, and with a feeling for elegance she had put tall candles on the polished table. Peggy had warned her that Major Lanair would probably be dining with us, so the table was extended and a third cover already laid. My shoulders against the mantelpiece, I surveyed the ritualistic display with satisfaction; two forks, a space, two knives, two glasses; the arrangement repeated at the far end; two silver candlesticks, three sweet-dishes, three starched napkins to save the ensemble from being too metallic; simple, sufficiently feminine for a man's evening taste.

Peggy had swiftly changed into a low-cut blue thing; with Lanair as my excuse I had merely substituted grey trousers for the white ones and put on a necktie. Lanair was still upstairs, complaining of the size of the bathroom and washing himself.

"He'll be ripe for his best stories when he's fed," I said. "What is there?"

"You shouldn't ask," Peggy protested.

"Tell me, dear."

"Roast ortolans," she whispered, "will that do?"

"That ought to make him reminiscent," I said.

After dinner we should make ourselves comfortable in the three big chairs which nearly filled the drawing-room. If the fire were good enough we would sit without the electric light, only the glowing coals and the red ashes in our pipes to keep us from falling asleep. From eleven onwards Lanair would talk about departing, and at twelve would ring up his man to say that he would not be in that night. Then we would throw on another log and settle deeper in our chairs while Lanair, in his low voice, now dramatic, now cynical, would tell how in his young days he was chased by ten angry farmers all the way from Abercorn Hotel into the Queen Victoria cattle sheds at Sydney Harbour.

"You did see your letters?" Peggy asked.

"No, were there any?"

"Two. They were on the hall chest."

Darnette, who had just brought in the grape-fruit, went to fetch them.

"Bills, probably," I said. "They always come by the afternoon post."

But they were not bills. They both bore German stamps. And

the postmarks indicated that they had been a long time in the post. The first I opened was from Ernst Gotthold. I glanced down the long sheet which was covered with small writing in violet script.

" . . . a letter from her, the first for many months, and she told of your visit. I am afraid she will never let you visit her again. There is the other matter, you see, as well as her husband. Everything is confused in her mind, and she will not think reasonably. But it is so good of you to offer to go again. I myself would go, but my work keeps me tied up here in Berlin for the present. And I doubt if she would see me. She is getting help, she says, from an American Society. That is all there is clear in her letter. That is something, but she will not leave Birnewald and I do not know what to do. . . ."

Peggy put a hand on my shoulder.

"Bad news?"

"No better," I said, and handed her the letter. "You can read it better than I can."

I tore open the other letter—it was postmarked, I noticed, several days later—and saw Bennett Williams' signature at the bottom.

Lanair came in.

"Sorry if I've kept you," he said.

"Oh, all right," I answered thoughtlessly.

I saw him and Peggy exchange a glance and Lanair, with a murmured apology, crossed the room to study one of the pictures. I flicked the sheet open again.

"My dear Saggard: I'm afraid I've got a very bad shock for you. I went round yesterday. Frau Gotthold is dead, and the boy has completely disappeared. . . ."

PART TWO

VI

THERE was certainly a slight breeze, for the window moved a little now and then, tugging at the pin that caught the holder, and the curtain, which had hung drooping over the window-sill, slipped outside, a sudden, stealthy movement. But it was a warm breeze, and if it penetrated into the room it only shifted the heavy, stifling air inside; fanning the sleeper's face—if it fanned it at all—only with a warm breath. It was perhaps the heat that woke him, though he had kicked off the bed-clothes; or perhaps a mosquito, which had feigned retreat for a time but was droning again now, near the ceiling, waiting to make a new attack. Perhaps he had not really slept at all, only dreamed in semi-wakefulness, conscious still of the creases in the pillow and the rub of the pyjama-cord against his waist. He had no idea of the time, but there were noises in the street outside, cars passing, the rumble of conversation, a few words coming up to him distinctly as the speakers passed below the window, dying away to let other voices take their places. Beyond that, underlying it, there was a louder noise, stronger, but suppressed by the distance intervening; rather like the sound of a beehive but less regular. The trams had stopped.

The passage light still showed under the door. Downstairs people were talking.

The day (as Klaus remembered it) had seemed unending. There had been thirty-three of them since he had come back from the hospital—where life had been so amusing, with all the other boys, and the very young nurse who could make the noise of every kind of beast created, and the huge fat one who pretended to be so cross when they hid her thermometer and whose teeth were always falling out while she was scolding one of the ward maids; thirty-three of them, every one duller than the last, dragging out interminably three o'clock, half-past three, four o'clock. . . . He was not properly ill now, and he was allowed to be in the garden all day. His temperature was still taken, morning and evening, and once every two days Dr. Heumüller came to say: "Well, there's nothing to be gained by hurrying things. Plenty of fresh air, what could be better for him!" But he felt as strong as ever, longing for the hardest exercise he could find, fretting at the garden walls which reduced the world for him to a space of sixty feet by ninety. "I feel better than I did before I was ill," he said

every day. But his mother had always the same reply. "None of us know if we are well, Klaus, we have to go to the doctor to find out." She smiled when she said that, a queer, far-away smile to show that it was a grown-up sentence which could not be argued with.

She was with him very little those days, and even when they were together, for breakfast and luncheon and occasionally when she did some sewing in the garden, she said hardly anything. She was worried about something. As for Fräulein Pilz, she was as much use as a sack of hay. Except, perhaps, as a timepiece. "You must come and wash your hands now. . . . It's time for you to go and lie down now." Insufferable arrogance, made worse by her sharp, superior voice. But at times, when he had bounced his ball against the wall of the toolshed till he could bounce it no longer, he looked forward to seeing her straight, stiff figure and hearing her peremptory summons. If Father had been at home it would have been different. He would have played Toad-on-the-wall half the morning, and invented games that Klaus could play for the other half, games that would make the time fly by until Fräulein Pilz appeared. Mother was no good at inventing games. She was enchanting when she read aloud in her soft musical voice; but he could not ask her to read aloud when she was so worried.

He had asked her that evening, when he was saying good night, if Father was coming home soon. "Yes," she said, and then: "No, I don't know. Some day soon, perhaps." There was something that no one would tell him, something they were all talking about, hushing when he came into the room; and he guessed that Father was mixed up in it somehow. He couldn't ask about it—Mother very seldom talked to him about Father, and when she did it was only in an ordinary way, as she might have talked of Herr Gruner, not a special way. He had grown to realize that there were two quite separate things,—Klaus with Mother, and Klaus with Father. There was a third thing, Mother and Father together. He had caught glimpses of it sometimes, coming suddenly into a room where they were alone together; but it seemed to vanish when he came upon it. It was there all the time, he knew, but it was one of those grown-up things which he had to be kept out of.

"Father's very busy," Mother said. "A soldier has to think about his country, only about other things when he has time." But there had been a letter from him this morning—Klaus had seen Anna taking it upstairs.

There was nothing more to say, except: "I understand, Mother." He had hoped that she would come and help him undress, but she had a lot more sewing to do. He undressed himself slowly, and he had

not got all his clothes off when she came in to kiss him. "You must hurry, Klaus," she said; "you ought to have been in bed long before this." He did hurry then, and gave his teeth a quick brushing, and jumped into bed without saying his prayers. Presently he remembered, got out of bed again and took the crucifix Father had given him out of the top drawer. He propped it on the window-sill and knelt barefoot before it. His thoughts, wandering, were mostly of Father. But he tried to connect God and the Blessed Virgin with him, and when he had been through his simple forms he said again and again: "Bring Father back quickly. I want him and Mother wants him. Do bring him back quickly." It was a kind of praying he had invented himself; he ended, nearly always, with: "—and forgive me if this is the wrong kind of praying." He felt better after that, jumped lightly on to the bed, pulled the Decke over him, lay still for a few seconds, and then kicked it off again. The mosquito, which had been waiting patiently behind the picture of St. Christopher, made her approach in narrowing circles.

Undoubtedly something unusual was going on downstairs. Anna, as a rule, went to bed shortly after Klaus—he pointed this out whenever she tried to talk to him like Fräulein Pilz—but he could hear her voice now, and a man's voice as well. Fräulein Pilz was talking very loudly; he could not quite hear what she said, but he caught the words "Dangerous," "Rash," "Unheard-of"; Mother's voice was always too quiet to be heard when she was downstairs, but he guessed that she was there, instead of in her room as she usually was after he had gone to bed. He was not certain, but he fancied the telephone-bell had rung. He had been dreaming that he was trying to get through a narrow doorway at the same time as an enormous goose, a goose with a horse's head, and as he had pressed against it it had uttered a long, shrill, ringing noise. That must have been the telephone, he thought now. It couldn't possibly have been the mosquito.

He got up, opened the door a few inches, and peeped out; then crossed the landing cautiously, went a little way down the stairs, and leaned over the banisters. The door of the drawing-room was open, and though he could see no one he saw shadows falling across the doorway. He waited, shivering a little, partly from excitement and partly because it was colder there, as he stood barefoot on the polish, with the draught blowing between the door of his mother's bedroom and the long stairway-window. The man—Klaus did not know who he was—was repeating and repeating one sentence in a lugubrious, rather servile voice. Fräulein Pilz was fussing, telling everyone to hurry,

complaining. It all seemed to be about something that it was dangerous to do. "Unsettled," "out of control" came again and again, and an indistinct or a flimsy thread of reasoning suggested to Klaus that his mother was being bullied. He tightened his grip on the banisters.

Presently Fräulein Pilz came out into the hall, her eyes fixed straight ahead, her mouth angry. She turned and came up the stairs, but she did not notice Klaus until she was nearly at the top. "Go back to bed at once!" she said as she passed. She went on, however, and disappeared into her bedroom, without giving him the shake and the smack on his rump that he expected. He stayed where he was. A few moments later his mother appeared, and she too came upstairs.

"What are you doing out here, Klaus?" she asked.

He could see that her mind was on something else, that she was hardly aware of him.

He faltered: "I couldn't get to sleep."

"You must go back to bed and try again."

She was leaving him, as Fräulein Pilz had done, but she turned back and caught his hand.

"Come along!" she said more gently, leading him towards his room.

"Are you going out, Mother?" he asked at a venture.

"Yes. Come along."

"What for?"

She told him, thinking that it was best to satisfy his curiosity.

"I'm going to see——" She paused. "I'm going to see Father."

"Oh."

He allowed her to take him into his room and go out again, closing the door behind her. Directly she had gone he turned on the light, threw off his pyjamas, and seized his shirt. Nervously and clumsily he began to dress. He could never dress himself quickly, and now that he was hurrying, striving desperately to pull on his knickers and do up his sleeve buttons at the same time, he became flurried and entangled. His braces, though he had only slipped and not unbuttoned them, seemed to have twisted themselves into a knot, and the right piece would not come over the right shoulder. On the landing outside, doors were opening and shutting; someone had gone downstairs; someone had come up again. At any moment the hall door might open, the draught-roller creaking to give warning, and shut again with a bang. He sobbed in the exasperation of trying to fasten his shoes. The left one must stay unfastened—he couldn't help it. A button

had come off his shirt. He would have to do without his tie. He caught hold of his jacket, thrust an arm into the sleeve and left the other sleeve swinging. Out on to the landing and down the stairs.

The front door was already open, and Mother was in the hall pulling on her gloves. Fräulein Pilz was fussing round her, and Anna was getting in Fräulein Pilz's way. The man, now visible as a stumpy shopkeeper, stood at a little distance, still explaining. No one seemed really to be helping Mother.

"I'm coming with you," Klaus shouted, as he ran down the stairs.

The three women turned together and looked up at the small figure.

"Ach Du kleiner Teufel!" Fräulein Pilz, almost hysterical, caught the boy as he rushed forward, swung him round by the shoulders, and pushed him back roughly towards the stairs. His mother stood irresolute for a moment, and then, darting forward, put herself between them.

"He can come," she said, with a sudden force in her voice, "he ought to come."

She buttoned up his jacket, took him by the arm and they went out together.

A cab was waiting at the gate, and Mother, pushing Klaus in front of her, stepped in. "Bahnhof Friedrichstrasse," she said to the driver. "There will be crowds," he warned her. "Go on," she said.

Klaus sat far back on the leather seat, his legs sticking straight out in front of him. His head was leant against his mother's shoulder, but she, sitting stiff and upright, did not notice him. That did not matter—he was happy, being with her, instead of in his hot little bedroom listening to the sound of the car driving off. The windows were all down, and it was delicious to feel the rush of cool air as they travelled fast through the lighted streets. "Are you cold?" Mother asked, suddenly remembering him. He only said: "Lovely, Mother." He was sleepy now, delightfully sleepy, in spite of the coldness, and he watched the lights streaming by, street lights, shop lights, lights in the windows of the houses, without having any idea where he was. Gradually his eyes became blurred by the succession of lights passing them, and he let them close. He may have slept for a minute or two, but the car, suddenly slowing down, made him open his eyes again, and he was aware that the street down which they passed was crowded. People were thronging the pavements and spreading out into the road, pressing almost against the sides of the car, blocking the road in front

of it and only giving it passage when the driver had added his shouts and curses to the hellish din of his horn; men and girls with arms linked together, the men shouting as they passed each other, some of the girls laughing; here and there old people, jostled by the crowd, trying to slip through it into the quieter streets, their faces grave and anxious; a unity about them, though they walked in different directions, so that Klaus, gazing in sleepy fascination from the security of the cab, felt that he was a being apart from a world of people who were blended into an army, for one moment exalted by the separation, at the next longing to join them, frightened to be outside. The car was moving only at a walking pace, forcing its way between men who would only move aside when the mudguards touched their trousers. From half a mile behind came a tremendous shout, a series of shouts, and the shifting column brought the shout forward. Everyone was shouting, it didn't matter what, even the grave old men thrusting their way with hands close to their sides. Everyone turned to look back, and some, changing their direction, started to run towards the place where the shout had started. But somewhere in that direction the way was blocked now, and the waves, breaking against the rampart, flowed back again until they joined and swept everything in front of them. Everyone was going in the same direction now, the direction in which the car was going. For fifty yards it moved a little faster, and Klaus felt for a moment that he was with the crowd, not a mere spectator. From a sign in a window he had discovered where he was—in the Leipzigerstrasse. They were turning into Wilhelmstrasse, and the crowd, eddying in the junction, was moving mainly to the right, while the car went left. Looking through the little window at the back he saw, fifty yards down the street, a man standing on a balcony, waving his arms and making a speech. The crowd below alternately listened and shouted. The shouts were taken up and carried far along the street, so that Klaus heard them, dwindling into uncertainty, when he could no longer see the man on the balcony. "Keep still, Klaus," his mother said. There were other cars in front now, so that the way was made for them slowly. Their driver kept his radiator within a foot of the next car, but men still slipped between. The line turned slowly eastwards into the Unter den Linden, where the crowd, a little sparser and a good deal noisier, covered the whole breadth of the street in a shifting confusion.

They were in a procession of cars and omnibuses which stretched both ways, a quarter of a mile in length, not more than a few feet between any two of them. It moved a yard at a time, stopped, moved on, stopped again. At the corner of Schadowstrasse, when they had been stationary for ten minutes, the driver got out.

"You would do better to walk from here," he said.

Mother was not certain, but when they had waited another three minutes and there was still no sign of the procession moving, she decided. Having paid the fare she took Klaus's hand and stepped down into the road.

For a whole minute Klaus was submerged in the swaying, jostling, excited crowd. He could see Mother's grey coat, quite close to his face, then a dark coat thrust between and he had lost her; but his hand was still in hers, grasped tightly, and he felt himself pulled between the struggling bodies as if through a mangle. At first, not fully revived from his sleepiness in the cab, he was dazed and almost suffocated; but in the emergency his manners gave way to primitive instincts and he found himself using his left elbow, prodding, pushing, forcing his own passage as the hand dragged him forward. Once in the Schadowstrasse, which they had almost missed as the crowd suddenly bore westward, they found their progress easier. Men and women still swarmed like flies, but they were not pressed shoulder to shoulder, and it was possible, by skipping and dodging, to make a pace faster than those who were going the same way. "We must hurry, Klaus." He did his best, as she broke into a trot, pulling him this way and that, trying to make him follow her through the gaps which opened suddenly and immediately closed again. "Hurry, Klaus!" He dodged as she did, but he was never in time—the opportunity had gone before he could respond to the tugs that led him now to the right, now left, round a group of men, between a fat woman and a lamp-post. He was short of breath and his legs felt wobbly. A man's elbow had come hard against the side of his head, making him dizzy for a moment and then sick. He ran on automatically, allowing the hand that held his to provide the impetus, only moving his legs so that he should not fall forward headlong. They were going to the right; now left again, though he hardly realized it, and here the crowd was denser. He was thankful for a check in the pace, too thankful, at first, to be frightened of the pressure and suffocation. Nearly everyone was going the same way here. No more dodging, but they could make steady progress with the people pushing behind. Klaus was hot, hotter than he had ever been in his life before; it seemed odd to be so hot in the middle of the night, with the stars overhead; hot, and rather sick and tremendously sleepy. There was really no harm in his going to sleep; it was like being in bed with all these enormous women round him acting as mattress and blankets; but he must keep his legs moving. For a second when he was squeezed tight and his face pressed into a coat in front he wanted to scream. But he controlled himself—if he screamed it would upset Mother, and Mother was enough upset already. He let himself

get drowsy, so drowsy that he would forget he wanted to scream, just awake enough to keep his legs stiff and moving. Slowly forward a yard at a time; the crowd squeezing tighter and tighter. He wondered how long it was since he had got out of bed. It seemed like about five hours, but it couldn't be that, or it would have been morning. It was quite light, a few feet above his head, but that was the street lamps. The sky, when he could tilt back his head to look, was still invisible, cut off by the fog of yellow brightness which the lamps made. His feet, moving in little jerks automatically, struck against something upright. Then he realized that they had come underneath a roof and were going up steps. Five steps up and everyone halted, Klaus on the fifth step, Mother on the sixth. Three more and another halt; then, quite soon, another twelve, so quick that Klaus could hardly count them. In the next surge forward they came close against a barrier. He could see now, in glimpses as the people beyond the barrier shifted, a train standing by the platform. The doors were open and people were struggling in. There was a lot of shouting and some fighting—schoolboy fisticuffs which the policemen stopped as soon as it broke out. Klaus, who had never seen grown men and women hitting each other, was intensely interested. With the free air not far away he could breathe better, and he was not so drowsy. The doors were slammed and the train moved away, leaving the platform comparatively empty. Away went the barrier and the crowd rushed forward, Klaus nearly at the front.

There was one seat free on a bench by one of the bookshops, and they both squeezed on to it. Klaus, limp and perspiring, closed his eyes.

He woke when there was a new stir on the platform. Mother had buttoned up his jacket at the neck and put her coat round him; she was holding it with her arm round his shoulders. In spite of that he shivered with cold. A train was coming. He heard the roar in the distance and a moment later saw the lights. Mother stood up and he jumped on to the seat behind her, standing with his hands on her shoulders. The train, one moment a missile, changed suddenly into a living presence as it pounded into the station, headlong as if it would never stop till it was fifty miles outside Berlin; but already the brakes were on, and Klaus's heart, which had jumped with excitement, fell into a measured, heavy beat. It had been glorious, that, worth getting up for, worth being squeezed in the terrifying crowd, just to see that long engine thrust past, vomiting fire from its funnel, glowing at its tail, immense and furious. The coaches were slowing down now, slower and slower until he could read *Raucher* on the windows of the carriages. Then they stopped, and the doors opened. That was

the end of the night's adventure, and he wanted to go home and get into bed—yes, he would be glad of its hotness—and think about it until he was asleep.

“Are we going back now?” he asked.

She did not hear him. She was standing on tiptoe, leaning forward a little, turning her head from side to side as her eyes ran up and down the length of the train. Only Klaus's hands on her shoulders kept her from pushing forward through the crowd. She was looking out for somebody, Klaus guessed. And then he remembered—Father.

He was not quite certain if he wanted to see Father. He wanted to be certain. He had been longing for Father for days and days. Now he felt that one desire, the desire to lie down and be warm, filled him so completely that it left no room for any other. Still, he did want to see Father. He wanted it more and more every moment, the wish growing stronger as his mind revolved upon it. He could not exactly picture Father at that moment. He could only imagine somebody who fitted in with a faintly remembered smell, a laugh he knew but could not quite remember, a form, so high, so broad, the details forgotten. It would all come back to him, and he wanted it to come back—it was something so much better than anything you could remember.

He had taken his hand away from Mother's shoulders and put them in the pockets of his jacket for warmth. There was a strange noise a few feet away, a woman crying, and he turned his head to see where she was. She was somewhere inside a little knot of people, two or three women, one man standing facing them; an older man was walking round and round, patting everybody on the back, trying to make everybody cheerful. It was only for two seconds that he watched the group, but when his eyes left them he found that Mother had moved away. He was startled—he could see her nowhere. But she was only a few feet away, and he saw the grey coat before he had time to be really alarmed.

He had felt how big she was, all the time that they were forcing their way through the crowd, the grey coat reaching far above him, the grey arm tugging him with relentless strength. Now she had grown suddenly small, absurdly small for a mother to be. A man had got her, a huge man in soldier's uniform, with one arm round her shoulders and another round her waist, his helmet bent down over the top of her so that her head was almost hidden in his chest. Her feet were off the ground. Klaus noticed how her coat was all ruffled up into two great folds that bulged out between the man's arms; the skirt of it caught up so that he could see several inches of her stockings;

how one of her arms fell limp outside the man's arms; how still and fixed her body was. He stared at this picture as he had stared at the other, calmly, without great curiosity; turned his eyes away for a few moments, since he knew that it was bad manners to stare; looked again, and saw the grey coat as it had been before, motionless.

The man let go of Mother after a time, and they began to walk away together; but the man asked her a question, and then they turned quickly and came towards Klaus. When the man's face came into the light of the lamp above him Klaus realized—it had not occurred to him before—that it was Father. He did not know what to do. He smiled, but it was only his everyday polite smile. It was difficult to know how to behave when Father appeared all of a sudden, after so many months, not just in the way you had expected him to appear. He said under his breath: "Guten Tag, mein Vater." But when Father had caught him and hugged him tight and kissed him twice on both his cheeks he remembered how Father had been before.

Mother stood away a little while Klaus and Father had their talk together. It was not much of a talk, for it only lasted two minutes and Klaus was too sleepy to say or to understand much. But they grinned at each other, and Father made little jokes, and called Klaus "Old man" as he had always done. He was serious for a few moments, and talked about Duty, and being brave, and the honour of the Fatherland. Then he laughed again, and gave Klaus another hug and more kisses.

After that they went away up the platform, Father and Mother together, leaving Klaus with Herr Oberleutenant Nauendorf, who had been standing close by. Lieutenant Nauendorf was a very amusing man; he had long waxed moustaches and grey eyes which leapt up and down, this way and that way, round and round, in their tremendous white saucers, while his narrow, light-brown eyebrows, perched ever so far up in his forehead, writhed and twisted in the most comical fashion. Klaus had no wish to be amused by Lieutenant Nauendorf, but he smiled politely at the soldier's little sallies. Nauendorf, seeing that the boy was cold, squeezed himself on to the bench, lifted Klaus on to his knees, and opening his great-coat spread it round him. Klaus was not altogether pleased; it was hardly dignified at his age, to sit on a man's knees in public; it was not like sitting on Father's knees in the garden; still, he was grateful for the warmth.

"And are you going to be a soldier when you grow up?" Nauendorf asked him.

"I don't know. I don't know how you get to be a soldier."

"Well the first thing is to learn how to get double rations out of a quartermaster-sergeant who's got Jewish blood on both sides of the family. The second is to be able to click your heels so loudly that you make the colonel's horse sneeze—kuck!—like that. And then the most important thing of all is to know how to get a very high temperature just when manœuvres are starting. It takes years to learn that, so you'd better start at once."

Klaus laughed aloud. He had no idea what Lieutenant Nauendorf was talking about, but he could see from the way his moustache moved, wriggling up and then flattening out like a caterpillar walking, that he was being very funny indeed. The smoke of his cigar, warm and pungent, covered Klaus's face in clouds, almost choking him; but it gave him a manly feeling, having the cigar so close to him, and it was fun to watch the tricks Lieutenant Nauendorf played with it, rolling it along his lips, making it dance, and then hang prostrate, tired-out, in one corner. At another time, when it was not so cold and so late at night, they might have had great games together, Klaus thought. Perhaps Father would bring him home, since he was a friend of Father's. Then they could all three go for walks together, and drives perhaps, and on the lake at Wannsee.

Thinking of going home, he wondered whether they would have to push through the crowd again. Of course it would be easier with Father pushing in front, but he didn't feel awake enough to do much struggling. Perhaps Father would carry him—no one would notice in a crowd like that, and if one of his friends saw—well, he couldn't say much about being carried by a soldier in uniform. There might be some other way out of the difficulty. If there was, Father would find it. The crowd might have gone away. He could still hear shouting and singing in the distance, but the platform was much clearer now that two more trains had gone. The train that Father had come in was still waiting and when that went it might leave the platform almost empty.

" . . . and when it's time for you to join up the headquarters of the army will be—where do you think? Paris! Not London. London would be too out-of-the-way and inconvenient. No, we shall use Paris."

Klaus knew the names well enough. "London on the Thames is the capital of England, Paris on the Seine is the capital of France, Rome on the Tiber. . . ."

"But Paris is in France," he said.

"At present," said Nauendorf. He took out the cigar, which had burned down to a stump, and made a series of gobbling motions with his lips, finishing up with a snap of the jaws as if he were catching a fly. "And then," he said, his eyes twinkling, "then your Father and I will retire to a palace in Versailles and live happily ever after. Ha!"

Klaus, fascinated by the fly-catching, tried to copy it. Nauendorf did it again, and Klaus followed. They were hard at it, laughing together and mocking each other, when there was a movement towards the train. Someone had blown a whistle and men were shouting. The groups on the platform had broken up, and all up and down the train soldiers were pushing each other through the doors. A corporal was hustling the few who loitered. In a long line the women were pressing against the windows of the carriages.

Turning, Klaus saw Mother and Father in a dark place half-way between two of the lamps, Mother in Father's arms again. Then they came up to him. Nauendorf had saluted and disappeared. Father picked up Klaus and kissed him. "Good-bye, Klaus!" he said.

Good-bye? It was only a slip, surely. Father was dreamy sometimes, and said the wrong word. Klaus couldn't quite see what was happening. Another soldier, one of the ordinary soldiers, had come up and saluted and said something. Now Father and Mother had both left him, and a soldier was holding people back, and Father was getting into one of the carriages. He had given Mother another kiss and she was standing back, looking at him through the window.

Everyone was cheering now, the people on the platform, and the soldiers in the train, shouting back and waving their helmets. Klaus was suddenly aware that the heads of the soldiers were moving. Father's head too. The cheer had died away into silence. Without his prompting a sheet of moisture fell in front of Klaus's eyes. He rubbed them viciously, his lips curling but still held together. His eyes became clearer gradually, and when he could see distinctly again the tail of the train was passing. Another cheer went up, and it was answered by the soldiers.

"Mother!" He was by her side now, holding her hand again. "Mother," he jerked out, "where's Father going?"

She had nothing left to control her speech, and she answered him quietly and brutally.

"To fight."

Still he did not quite understand. He had got his mouth well

under control, and by clenching his fists he kept the moisture from coming back to his eyes. Gazing after the train, he saw the little red light grow fainter, fainter, and then disappear. There was nothing to see after that but the rails gleaming where the light of the lamps fell on them, and the lights farther distant, and the smudgy darkness. He was very cold.



VII

KLAUS was cold when he woke up on a February morning, and turning his head on the pillow looked right and left along the dormitory. A faint light came in through the high windows at each end, enough to reveal the twenty beds on each side as waves on a grey sea. Hans, in the next bed, was still snoring, and from one on the other side—Walter's, probably—came a noise that was not so much a snore as a protracted snuffle. Now and then there was a creaking, as someone stirred and turned over. But for the rest the waves were silent and still.

He had two blankets, one serge and the other frieze, but with a white frost and ponds frozen solid outside, with cracks between the boards of the door and some of the windows broken, they were not enough. Enough for Hans, certainly; he thought that the Abbey was everything the word "luxury" meant, knowing no other habitation but a *schuppen* on the edge of a potato field. And the others, most of them, were warm enough to stay asleep, curled up with their knees almost touching their noses, every limb engaged in generating heat for its fellow. But Klaus, with his long, stiff-jointed body, found it hard to curl up, and invariably became uncurled as he slept. This was the fourth night the cold had woken him; first a little before one o'clock—he had heard the clock strike—when one blanket had been on the floor and the other twisted round his legs, leaving the upper half of his body uncovered. He had stretched out for the missing blanket, unravelled its partner, and sleepily poked and pushed them till the whole of him was under cover. But a foot had come out almost at once, and in trying to spread the blankets that way he had pushed them off his shoulders; a little later, turning on to the other side, he had found himself completely uncovered again. After another struggle, he slept uneasily, dreaming cold dreams, till discomfort had overcome inertia and he had got up to remake the bed properly, standing barefoot on the boards, fumbling with the clothes, knocking his legs against the sharp edge of the frame. It had not been a very successful remake, but good enough to give him sleep of a sort for two hours. Now, awake again and more fully conscious than before, he found that the blankets were not tucked in but were affording him some defence as long as he kept quite still. He thought

of getting up and making the bed once again, but decided that it was not worth while. There was not long to go. So he lay, cramped, without stirring a leg or an arm. He longed to be in his day clothes.

Footsteps rang on the stone stairs outside, the latch was jerked up, and the heavy door creaked open. Thomas, leanest and palest of the novices, stood in the doorway swinging his lantern.

"Arise, Brethren, and give praise unto God!"

His morose, rheumy voice had the effect of a pebble dropped into the ocean. Hans' snores continued unabated, and as if in plain defiance a new noise, a long wheeze that ended in a nasal grunt, started in the far corner. Erich, in the bed nearest the door, pulled up his knees a little further. His neighbour turned over.

The thought of rising made Klaus feel that he was dead with sleepiness and that his bed was the warmest place in the world. If Brother Thomas would go away he would be perfectly content, happy to lie in that cramped position all day long, without food or drink if only no one would disturb the bedclothes. Better anything than to bare himself to the bitter, naked air of the dormitory and force his sleep-bound limbs into all the hundred actions that the day would bring, his heavy brain to the books and writing. He pulled his toes a little further up the bed and arrived at a position of supreme comfort; why, he wondered miserably, had he not found it before? He had, perhaps, another whole minute to enjoy his contentment; and concentrating upon the business of enjoyment he found that enjoyment was gone.

"Arise, Brethren, and give praise unto God!"

The novice began to advance slowly up the room, and as he repeated his reveille he pulled at a leg, pinched an ear, slapped a bare foot, shook Paul's head with a hand entwined in his short, black hair. "It's all right, Brother Thomas, I'm awake," Klaus said, as Thomas reached him. "So you needn't put your dirty cold hands on me," he added under his breath. "Arise and give praise to God," Thomas muttered. He arrived back at the door, hung the lamp on an iron bracket, and disappeared. The snores continued.

He was hardly gone before the chapel bell began, only forty yards away, splintering somnolence with the noise of a devil's merry-making. At once the forty boys tumbled out of their beds, and made for the long bench down the centre of the dormitory where their clothes lay in heaps. Klaus and half a dozen others, still swayed by a remorseless upbringing, ran barefoot to the table at the end where there were two tin baths, buckets of water, and a pile of knitted wash-rags. Throwing off their night clothes, but careful to keep their loins covered as the rule demanded, they plunged the

rags into the buckets, squeezed the water out, and dabbed them on face and chest. Then back with a rush to the clothes bench, where in the imperfect light that the lamp supplied everyone was struggling and fighting for his own garments. In four minutes the dormitory was cleared except for a few who had been losers in the scrimmage, and who were searching under the beds for an odd shoe or stocking. Klaus, last of all to finish dressing, followed Hans—who was always slow by reason of his bulk and his potato-growing ancestry—in the charge downstairs; across the quadrangle, and into the cloister. They broke into a walking pace here, with hands folded in front, for there were saints in the niches and twenty-four abbots were asleep beneath the stones on which they walked; dead slow, for Brother Laud was standing at the far end, and his practised eye would see the least sign of hurry.

Klaus was opposite Saint Gregory, half-way along, when the bell stopped. The chapel door stayed open for five seconds longer, and he slipped through just before it was closed. But Brother Laud had written his name in the book of disciplinary offences.

From the other door Brother Jacobus entered, and the First Exercise began.

An hour later Brother Otto was saying grace, as the boys stood, with hands folded, along the two tables in the refectory. The food, two herrings on brown bread for each boy, was already on the table, and was falling from lukewarm to cold as Brother Otto's voice gurgled on, rising and falling. (No one else spoke Latin with quite so Teutonic an accent as Brother Otto—his mispronunciation was a joke even with the Nuper Admissi.) It was warmer than it had been in the Chapel—that was something; but beneath their lowered eyelids the eighty boys peeped at the herrings with the lust of starved lions.

" . . . in sæcula sæculorum, Amen!"

"Amen!" the boys echoed.

Leaning forward as he lifted his feet over the bench, Klaus whispered to Erich: "The old fool saw me—I'm in the book for it."

He had hardly moved his lips, but instantly one of the two novices standing by the door came forward.

"Dixi?" he inquired.

"Dixi, 'Laus deo pro nova die!'"

"Sed hæc non est hora verbis."

Klaus murmured "Peccavi!" and sat down. That would probably mean that his name would be underlined, unless Brother

Marcus decided to be kind and say nothing about it. Discipline, after all, was not his sole preoccupation, as it was Brother Laud's. He carved one herring into thirds, his knife going through the fish more easily than through the bread, and put one third into his mouth. The noise of lips smacking and knives grating on the tin plates was broken by Brother Otto's voice, as he opened the *Life of St. Anthony of Padua* and began to read rapidly and indistinctly, trying to take each paragraph in a single breath, failing always, with the effect of a man learning the bagpipes, taking in a new breath and rushing madly towards the break. Dry mouthed, Klaus took his mug of beer and tried to drink it. But it was still too cold. He would have to finish the herring first, and then his mouth would be warm enough to bear it.

Eating steadily—there was bread enough if there was nothing else—he let his eyes wander up and down the row of faces opposite him; not turning his head more than an inch or two each way, for that would have suggested inattention to the lecture. Directly opposite, Erich was devouring his herrings in small, quick mouthfuls, his head lowered, his tiny black eyes fixed on his fork. He was business-like in his eating, as he was in everything, always making the best of what there was to be had, frequently finding some way of getting what there was not. If anyone's top blanket was missing it was fairly certain to be found on Erich's bed, and if the loser were strong enough to complain, it was the servant who had carelessly put it there. Generally the loser did not complain, since it happened after a quarrel with Erich that a novice found out about something you had done. They did not dislike him, for he was a cheerful little demon, and the methods by which he got his own way were always amusing. He was a Jew, they said (though he vehemently denied it) so what could you expect? On his left sat Arthur, narrow-headed and with a high forehead, ascetic and intellectual, actually wearing spectacles. He appeared to be listening to Brother Otto, eating only to keep his hands occupied as a woman knits when reading. He was younger than most of the others, but he looked older, except for his mouth, which was weak and childish. Almost from the day of his admission he had fallen naturally into the mould of the Abbey; he enjoyed the life, though "enjoyment" but coarsely describes the satisfaction it gave him, particularly the devotional elements in it. Some of the scholastic exercises were tedious to him—mathematics he disliked and the new sciences meant nothing to him; but he liked history, which he read more widely than the course demanded, loved poetry, particularly philosophic poetry, and would have gone further into metaphysics had his theological caution

allowed him. The Brothers eyed him with favour, seeing in him a bulwark of the Order, confident of his steady progress towards novitiate and ultimately the Vows. He was born to be a Veronian, they said; and Erich, who could see as much and disliked him for it, said that he was a natural son of the Abbot. Paul Gaedicke, sitting beside him, had seemed to be going the same way; but with less mental stamina he had been overwhelmed by the religious exercises, which instead of filling him with sublime passions had become a haunting obsession, so that he steeped himself in his devotions, wretched when his powers of concentration failed him, eagerly and nervously pursuing the spiritual substances, driven frantic by the secular preoccupations which he was forced to undergo in the school-room. He sat hunched with his eyes on the table a foot in front of his place, his flabby mouth only just opening to allow the food to go in as his hand came up regularly and automatically. He was not listening to a word of St. Anthony's spiritual adventures. His own still occupied him, and he was remembering how in the Exercise his thoughts had constantly wandered to his numbed hands and toes, to his stiff back, to all the physical conditions which should have fed his piety but which seemed only to distract him from sacred contemplation. Klaus could see, as he bent a little lower to meet each mouthful, the curious veins on the top of his closely-shaved head. Heinrich, sitting next to Paul, was grinning affably. The Brothers let him grin because nothing could stop him. They had tried for a time, but finding that the smile was still spread across his features even as he acknowledged their reproof and promised never to smile again, they had admitted to each other that the Creator knew better than they how to make boys' faces and that the phenomenon could not be held as subject to correction. He laughed too, loud and long, whenever laughing was not expressly forbidden, and talked in a big gruff voice and made jokes with great gusto about nothing in particular. He was not a bad boy. He broke none of the more important rules, did not absent himself from Exercise without proper reason or cause any kind of mischief. Nor was he mentally deficient—his scholastic ability combined with his general aptitude for personal comfort disproved that hypothesis. And when the Brothers had got used to a clown's face staring up at them throughout the Ordinances they decided that the Spirit of Holiness had made his heart glad, even as it had made the heart of Saint Eleanus.

Klaus drank off the rest of his beer; it was unpleasant, but he felt the better for it; and turning his eyes in the other direction let them rest on Hans. Hans was eating with solemn enjoyment,

not with the furtive, mouse-like avidity of Erich on his left, but with slow, bourgeois thoroughness, filling his mouth chock-full with a lump of bread the size of an orange, masticating with the combined oral movements of a horse and cow, swallowing the residue with a gulp and filling up again. This was his good time, one of the three half-hours that he spent in the Refectory each day, when his soul rose as far as a gelatinous soul can rise, becoming kin with all the loveliness which the world offered. Klaus liked him better than any of the others, though Heinrich was more amusing as a companion, Erich an entertaining fellow in his better moods, and Arthur by reason of his scholarship nearest to him of all. Hans smelt of things homely; not precisely the homeliness that Klaus knew; but all the others, except possibly Heinrich, had something of the Abbey in them; he could not think of them except through the Abbey; whereas Hans belonged to the Abbey as little as an elephant to a lady's boudoir. The Abbey, which made the most diverse personalities its own, had failed to stamp its impress on this, the simplest mind that had ever come within its little circle, perhaps because that mind was too flaccid to hold firmly any impress except that which birth and the potato-fields had given it. Hans' parents had thought that their son was a scholar. Under the instruction of a village shopkeeper he had learnt to read, and he could do sums with a piece of chalk on the side of a shed. They had slaved and sweated and contrived and cajoled the village priest to get Hans admitted to some place of learning, with the result that he had arrived, one summer day, at the gate of the Abbey, very hot and awkward, rudely clad, smelling of manure, anxious to do all that was asked of him. And he had stayed, since the Brothers were always optimistic, living the simple life with unostentatious pleasure, well-disciplined, only just unpunctual, regular in devotional exercises, unable to understand a word that was taught him by the patient Brothers Scholastic, unaware that there was any importance whatever in the writing and figuring which passed every day, like a running frieze, before his quiet, broad eyes. To him it was very fine to sleep eighteen inches above the floorboards on an iron bedstead; to find food waiting for him, three times every day, on a clean bare table; and for the rest, what did it matter if he spent the day in abject boredom? It was only another kind from the boredom of the long potato-fields, and it was infinitely less uncomfortable in the suffering. True, there were times when he found things lacking, when something, the sun rising early into a clear sky or the wind bringing from a distance the faint odour of pine forests, told him that the world had grown smaller than the world should be for a lad of twelve stone with a horse's legs and the

biceps of a pugilist. But it was worth it—peasant wisdom always reminded him that it was worth it—to be shut away from familiar and lovely smells when the enclosing walls kept out the cruel wind and neither weather nor phytophthora upset the tranquillity of this high living. He spoke very little, only an occasional heavy remark about some simple matter near at hand; but he was easy to talk to, always fixing you with his big animal eyes, assenting to everything you said with the chesty grunt that was his favourite means of expression. He repeated nothing to those who should not hear, for even if he remembered what you told him he was not artist enough to re-form the necessary phrases; and with the feeling of safety that this gave you, you told him anything that was in your mind, how weary you were of the Exercises, how bad the food was getting, how much you loathed Franz Krumholz or Brother Laud. He was still more a comforter by reason of his indifference to the surroundings. There were times when Klaus felt that the Abbey had got him, that it was nothing but a trap to catch a boy starting on the way to manhood and to force him into its own pattern. Every hour of the day, everything you did and everyone you saw was coloured with the grave monochrome of the Abbey walls; except Hans. And Hans, in his apartness, in the resistance of his peasant blood to the austere refining of the Brothers, suggested that escape was possible.

Klaus started, feeling a stealthy kick on his ankle, and turning his eyes rapidly from Hans' round face saw Erich's aimed upon him. He pushed over one of his last two pieces of bread, not quite sure whether he didn't want it or was being generous or was frightened of Erich. Having torn the other piece into small fragments he began to eat them one by one. He hoped it would be warmer in the pupil-room.

" . . . and on the third day the same event occurred. Likewise on the fifth day, and on the seventh. Whereat he wondered, and was dismayed in his heart. . . ."

It worried Klaus, as he gazed along the line of cropped heads, to know that his own head was thickly covered with hair. It was a whim of his mother's not to have his hair cut close, and though he wanted to belong to his home in Berlin much more than to the bleak Abbey he did not like to be physically different from the others. Physical difference made you a freak, and being a proper German was still more important than not being entirely a proper Veronian. He could forget the deformity as a rule, but this morning, joining itself to the cold and the other little irritations, it weighed on his mind. He would feel better when he got to work on his Euclid.

" . . . so when it occurred the eleventh time, upon the eleventh

day, the merchant, so this chronicler tells us, became so much troubled that he sent his servant to visit the hill town of Terene, where it was rumoured that happenings not unlike those which had come to pass in his own household were every day witnessed by a multitude of townsfolk towards the hour of sunset."

As if snipped off with a pair of scissors Brother Otto's voice stopped. But almost at once, before the boys had finished shuffling to their feet, he broke into the after grace, taking it at top speed. The words joined by a thousand repetitions into one tremendous polysyllable. In fifty seconds it was over, and the boys, having walked demurely to the door, broke out into their twenty minutes' freedom.

Freedom to talk, shout, laugh, sing or bully one's inferiors. But Klaus did not feel sociable, and he had his own ideas for spending those precious minutes. He made haste with his natural affairs, and to warm himself ran three times round the quadrangle. Running hurt him, for his feet were still numb and the sharp air was ragged against his lungs, but the exercise was sufficient to quicken his circulation, and when he had stood for a minute slapping his hands against his narrow chest he began to feel a glow coming. That was sufficient for his purpose. Cold or no cold, this was the time for this special enjoyment, and he meant to have the benefit of the privilege allowed him. Having made his way between the bakery and the Audit Chamber he turned into the tunnel where the fuel was brought through for the furnace, and emerging at the other end came to a small square yard which stood between a high double gate and a small stable. Standing in the middle of the yard was a small, dilapidated motor-car. Sitting in the motor-car, all wrapped up in blankets, with a shawl over his head, and with his spectacled eyes intent upon the *Eight Stages of Pilgrimage*, was Brother Lucius.

"God be with you, Brother Lucius! Is there anything wrong with it this morning?"

Brother Lucius peered up over his spectacles, his eyes mildly surprised, his mind still in the *Eight Stages*.

"And with you, my son! What is it? Ah, the motor-car!"

He was about to say that there was nothing whatever wrong with the motor-car, but remembered in time why he had been sitting there, ill-protected against the cold, instead of in his comparatively comfortable cell.

"Yes," he said uncertainly, "yes. I forget for a minute what it is. Oh yes. The brake. It wants tightening. It does not hold me back enough when I come down the hill from Götzberg. No, no! Wait one moment!"

Impatient, with so little time to spare, Klaus was already starting to dive under the footboard.

"You must have something underneath you," Lucius said, "or you will get your clothes dirty."

Klaus took the blanket that Brother Lucius was holding out and pushed it underneath from the radiator. He thought it rather stupid of Brother Lucius to make a fuss about dirtying his short gown and trousers, which were both jet black, but it was worth while being obedient; there were no other Brothers who owned motor-cars, and if they had owned them none of them—except Brother Josef—would have let him be their mechanic. He was stretched under the car now, Brother Lucius standing and watching his feet with interest. "It can't be very loose," he called up; "you probably want them re-lined. Have you got a middle-sized spanner?"

Lucius lifted the seat and began to fumble in his untidy toolbag, hurrying, for he knew that Klaus's time was limited. He smiled to himself—he was a young man, not more than thirty-five, and he still found smiling natural—to think of the lad's eager pleasure. He had bought the car after no little discussion with the Elder Brethren, to allow him more frequent visits to the sick people at Götzberg; for like his patron he was a physician; he felt now that the purchase would have been worth while if only for the enjoyment it gave to this queer, lanky boy, who found happiness in the feel of a spanner and in the mending of a leaky radiator. Theirs was a bargain of mutual value, for Lucius, who knew his way so well about the human anatomy, could hardly tell the difference between a cylinder and a sparking-plug. Without his voluntary mechanic the car would have been nearly always idle, since he had bought it for two hundred marks and there was something for Klaus to do nearly every day. They had a friendship, the owner and the unpaid servant, though they met only to transact this special business and even then spoke little to each other.

"Here it is my son."

"Thank you, Brother Lucius. And the oil-can?"

It was an awkward thing to get at. If he had been the maker of the car he would have placed it two inches further forward—it would have been clear then and nothing would have been lost. There was not much time, but he thought he could manage it. "Thank you. And a nut this size—there, it's just by my foot—if you have it. The thread's gone in that one." He worked away contented, almost forgetting the minutes flying.

The bell rang, he gave the last nut a twist, and scrambled out.

"I think that will be all right."

"Here, wait a minute, your face is filthy!"

Lucius caught up the sleeve of his habit, spat on it, and wiped the boy's face, drying it with the other sleeve. Klaus stood impatiently. "Can I come to-morrow and fill up your batteries? They'll want it by now." "Yes, certainly. One minute, there's a big smudge on your ear. Brother Laud will have you in Silence if he sees it. There! Run!"

Klaus ran for his life, into the tunnel, out, round the corner, across the quadrangle. The bell was still ringing when he dashed, again the last, into the pupil-room. Brother Laud, quietly judicial, put a dotted line under his name in the book of disciplinary offences.

Half the Section was nodding over the desks. The few who were nearest to the door, weaker members, had their hands tucked into their gowns and were working their legs up and down desperately, shivering with the cold. The stove was at the other end of the two benches, and within a radius of a few feet the heat was terrific. Further away the wind blowing under the door and sweeping the room on its way to the north window took all the heat away with it. Brother Walter, as cold as any of the boys but accustomed to it, drew figures of infinite complication on the blackboard, his mind divided between a geometrical problem quite different from the one he was elucidating and a little work he was composing (to be dedicated by permission to the Abbot and the College) on the Synthesis of Divine Temptation. Holding the stump of chalk in his numbed fingers he sketched two intersecting arcs, joined one of the angles at the base to the point of intersection, and grunted: "Now! does that help you?" "Is that line meant to bisect the angle, Brother Walter?" Erich asked. "That's what I want you to tell me, Erich Bauer."

Klaus had pushed himself between Erich, who had the end position next to the fire, and Otto Bauchwitz; by no means to Erich's pleasure, since he now had only six inches of bench to sit on and instead of being comfortably hot was roasted. Klaus himself was hotter than he wanted to be—he wished he had made himself a place in the second bench. Paul, two places off, had gone fast asleep. Heinrich had started with some skill to draw a red herring across the path of learning by enlarging upon the possible significance of the adjacent angle at R, and heedless of Brother Walter's nervous interruptions was approaching the dubious equality of $\angle ATN$ and $\angle ATQ$ by the unique method of moving from point to point all round the figure, not neglecting to encroach upon the by-lanes which

Brother Walter had constructed with a view to further deductions at a later stage.

"I think, Brother Walter, that if you could draw the figure a little more clearly we might see our way better——" Erich was restive and fretful, rather than insolent, trying to vent his own sufferings on anyone who would make a target.

"What did you say, Erich Bauer? What was that? Silence, please, Heinrich!"

Heinrich, who was still elaborating his theories, subsided. "I was only trying to be helpful," his face said, incriminatingly demure for just four seconds.

"Why did you push yourself in?" Erich whispered to Klaus.

"Silence, please, silence!"

Brother Walter drew two more intersecting arcs and turned round. Jerking his head from side to side he peered anxiously towards his pupils. He was a man nearing fifty-five, completely bald, short-sighted; his jaw was nearly always tight, holding his lips a little, so that he would have looked sour or even angry if they had not been soft, moist lips. His nose was straight and finely-cut, but it was not enough to offset his ugliness. Children between babyhood and adolescence were frightened of him.

"Now," Brother Walter said, "what is it you have to say, Erich?" He was wondering if it would be unseemly to introduce a passage from Descartes to illustrate his meaning in the fifth section. "Nothing? You then, Klaus! Can you explain to me how we know that the line bisects the angle?"

Klaus wriggled and started to stammer. He had seen the whole thing quite clearly a minute before, but Erich pinching him had put it out of his head. He wished he were back underneath Brother Lucius' motor-car.

"But we don't know, do we, Brother Walter?" Heinrich contributed.

"It is what we have to prove," Walter answered, with his nearest approach to slyness, spoilt by a trace of embarrassment. "You, Arthur, can you explain?"

In a voice that showed his gentle contempt for the whole subject, Arthur solved the problem succinctly, closing his lips with a distinct gesture when he had finished. He was a serious, upright young German. His fellows sighed with relief. Those who were nearest the stove pushed away from it, working against the strenuous resistance of those who, at the opposite end, were blue and weeping from the draught. Feet began to shuffle and books toppled over the edge of the desks.

"But I still feel, Brother Walter, that my way would have worked out in the end."

"Enough, Heinrich!" At a further stage the problem would have become quite interesting; Brother Walter had intended to give it a twist that would bring it near to the mathematics which he made one of his hobbies; but it was useless to try and teach it to boys. Was Euclid, after all, a part of that wide culture for which the Veronian Order was esteemed throughout the world? Was he not merely wasting his time to please those who had no understanding of what the development of a Christian mind meant? And how could he pursue his own studies when his mind was continually vexed and unbalanced by nourishing dyspeptics with matter so un-nourishing? "That is enough for this morning," he said, trying to make his voice firm. "We shall read Schiller." Then: "No!" It was vindictiveness, but he could believe that it was the support of discipline. "No! We shall read Milton."

The ghost of a groan ran along the back bench, and somewhere a voice said: "But, Brother Walter, is it quite patriotic to read Milton?"

The question was followed by an awed silence, and Brother Walter asked abruptly: "Who said that? Who was it?" For a moment his sudden wrath had made him into a man, and at this unusual manifestation the Section sat spellbound. No one answered him. In a few moments his anger had vaporized into calmness, and he said, his voice shaking a little: "Who has the Milton? You, Paul Gaedicke? Very well, you shall begin the Milton-reading. The third book, from the beginning, please."

The back bench composed themselves for sleep; if the book went straight round, as it probably would, it would take a long time to get to them, even if it arrived at all before the clock struck and it was time for church history. Paul, having rubbed his eyes while his neighbour found the place for him, turned very red, opened his mouth, gasped several times like a fish in the net, and began, with the German sounds that seemed nearest to the odd spelling before him, to read aloud. Brother Walter's mind had already ambled gently away, not to the Synthesis, which his little flurry had driven into the remote shadows, but to a conception of harmony which he thought he could achieve synthetically out of the dry bones of pure geometry. He would not have admitted the concept as dogma of his metaphysic, but he thought, in his timid and cautious imaginings, that all pure science, proceeding deductively from an ideal source, must surely be meant by the Creator to lead towards some new revelation of His own mystic, harmonious perfection. The outer

world, aggressively material, slightly perturbed by its constant obtrusion. He could see quite clearly, since it was exactly within the arc of his best vision, the line of the front bench, straight, flat, without harmonic possibility, and the books and inkwells upon it; behind that a blur of round bullet-heads. When his eyes swung left he could see through the unstained portion of the narrow windows a part of the quadrangle, bold enough in its construction to make a definite image, with a clear sky lighting it. It was connected with a hundred little memories of sensation, of meals in the Great Refectory, of bitter-hard devotions in the Chapel and in his own cell. It led him away even further, to the image of his cell in a mass of detail, to letters he had read there, a letter from his brother hundreds of miles away in a pandemonium where all hard and solid things had reached their destiny in mutual destruction. The thought halted his wandering as a rider checks his horse with a quick, sharp tug at the bit; and he hurried back, frightened, to the place he had left, where lines and circles, circles formed by circles, heritage from the great minds of mystics who had pondered in other places of holiness in the Church's golden age, turned themselves inside his head as he tried to grapple with them, to control them, to make them turn towards his own purpose without spoiling the sublime pattern to which they had reached already. It was too much for his power of concentration. Gradually a new disturbance was making itself felt, and he became aware of Paul's hollow voice, coughing and stuttering, floundering through words he could recognize faintly as foreign words that he loved.

"Genug!" he said suddenly, the word surprising him as it leapt from his mouth. "Translate now! No, give the book to Klaus, and he will read for us."

Klaus took the book casually, careful to conceal his emotion. It was bad enough having long hair, and he would not admit, certainly he would not betray to Erich by word or sign, that Paul's reading of those English words had made him feel as if someone was singing with all the notes flat. He wanted to read well now, to show Paul how it should be done; he knew the way, for in secret Brother Walter had helped him with his English, thinking a few hours in a week not too much to sacrifice for a pupil who in this subject showed a feeling towards his own cherished culture; but the Milton-reading was no time for showing off. He put his finger on the line and began clumsily, deliberately introducing a Teutonism where the letters allowed it.

Presently he forgot his resolutions. Approximately he knew the meaning of much that he read, but even where the sense vanished

the words kept their colour and he could recognize it. Inevitably, as his mind caught the colour, his tongue made it into sound; by comparison with a native's reading his would have been awkward, unconvincing; by comparison with Paul's it was near to very perfection. Brother Walter, retreating from the harmonies his mind strove after, listened to him. Erich, his quick intelligence making him realize that something was being well-performed, listened, and further along the bench Arthur turned his head. The rest realized nothing. Klaus read on:

*"I sung of Chaos and Eternal Night,
Taught by the heav'nly Muse to venture down
The dark descent, and up to reascend,
Though hard and rare."*

Something bewitched him, and as his voice fell into the cadences he forgot the heat on his cheek, forgot Erich still poking him. Brother Walter listened with his jaw relaxed, his eyes on the ground, his mind lulled so that he did not trouble to fix on the sense, remembering only through a practised memory, the concept that the words made for him.

*" . . . but chief
Thee Sion and the flowerie Brooks beneath
That wash thy hallow'd feet, and warbling flow,
Nightly I visit."*

Seeing a word ahead on which he would stumble, outraging the rhythm, Klaus stopped. And then the clock struck.

Brother Walter awoke to the passage of time. "That is enough for to-day, Klaus. We turn now to church history." He paused and fumbled for his book, the lines running on in his mind's ear beyond where Klaus had stopped. Then he said suddenly: "You read very well, Klaus. You read almost like an Englishman."

The Section, awaking from its torpor, expressed with kicks and nudges its satisfaction with this first-class sensation.

By the end of the morning studies Erich had carved his opportunity into artistic shape. The work so absorbed him that he came near to forgetting the discomfort of his narrow perch by the stove, which was the cause of the grudge, and when Brother Walter asked him a question, a perfectly plain and obvious question about Avignon,

he ignored it altogether. Brother Walter thought he might be ill, or might have left the room altogether; his eyesight deceived him so much that it was at least possible; and passed on to the next boy.

There was an interval of eight minutes, during which talking was allowed, between studies and midday refection. It was long enough for Erich to start the publication of his masterpiece. He took Paul aside—Hans would be too stupid to grasp it—and whispered to him: "Klaus does read English well, doesn't he?"

Paul said: "Yes," and moved away, always nervous of Erich and uncertain where the subject would lead them. But Erich pursued him.

"You know why? It's a terrible thing, but I think you ought to know." (The bare suggestion of moral duty would be enough to hold Paul while he went a little further.) "You see, it's such a lesson for us all—the awful consequences of evil."

Paul was quite fascinated; his spiritual hysteria always found solace in heart-to-heart intercourse, and to discover this seriousness in Erich, whom he had always thought so worldly, came to him like an unexpected fragrance from a mud-pit.

"It is very sad," Erich went on, his voice rich with spiritual emotion. "You see, Klaus really is English—or half-English. Yes. His father is a soldier, and when he was quite young he went over to England to fight—no, to take part in some manœuvres between the German and English armies. Yes, practice manœuvres. The two armies used to meet for practice every year before the war, when the two emperors were friendly—didn't you know that? Well, he went one day into a beer-house, a beer-house in Westminster, and he saw a beautiful woman there serving beer, and he made himself friendly and invited her to come and see him in the barracks. Then, when she came,"—he began to stammer—"when she came—well, I don't like to tell you about it—a terrible thing happened. He was tempted of the devil. You know——"

Paul turned red. His spiritual joy had gone, and he found himself face to face with terrible things, things about women, things he did not understand and hardly dared to think of. Someone had started to tell him once—old Brother Johannes it was—and he had stopped him, bewildered and upset, but not before he had learnt a little. Now, in a brief sentence, Erich had brought the revolting subject back to his mind, from which he had tried so hard to banish it. For a moment he thought of running away, but before he could check the words, boyish curiosity, vanquishing his

neurasthenia, made him satisfy himself with one whispered question. "You mean—he kissed her?"

Erich turned his head. A gust of laughter, wide and strong as a hurricane, surged up inside him and tried to escape from his mouth in a howl of Rabelaisian ecstasy. He restrained it, though the effort brought real tears to his eyes.

"Yes," he said choking, his face still turned away, "yes, he kissed her—on the lips. And that was how Klaus came."

The bell summoned them.

Needing a confidant with this black load on his mind, Paul sought Arthur in the interval between refecton and Second Exercise. The older boys were allowed then to wander at will within certain boundaries and to talk to each other, provided that they did not raise their voices, laugh, or collect in large groups. Their conversation was expected to be of a devotional character, but the liberalism of the Order allowed other serious subjects, and no blame would have fallen on a boy who was overheard reciting Homer, Racine or Goethe to his companion. Arthur had taken a "Life of St. Ignatius" from the junior library and was reading as he paced slowly between the cloister and the windows of the refectory. Paul joined him and walked at his side for several crossings without speaking, Arthur hardly noticing him. At last he said: "Arthur, may I interrupt you?"

Arthur closed the book and nodded. He seemed immensely old and wise, yet he was still a pupil, and that combination of high wisdom with lowly status made him in Paul's eyes almost perfect as an unofficial confessor. He surveyed Paul with inquiring eyes. He could never quite understand Paul; the others—except Klaus Gotthold—went into their several categories, and without troubling much to penetrate them—for he had no ambition to be a confessor—he felt that he knew their values. Paul bore many of the signs of a mystic, but if he possessed the power of intense communion it did not seem to strengthen him, and he could not understand a mysticism which did not call into being, as it cut away the fetters holding the soul back, a power and tranquillity which raised the seeker into a place above the ordinary struggles that Descartes had mapped out. He could not accuse Paul of *Heuchelei* but he wondered if God had not other service for those who moved so stumblingly along the steep path.

"What is it?" he asked.

Paul turned his eyes away and began to stammer. "It is a

problem which weighs on my mind. Can—is it possible—can you tell me, Arthur, whether one who is—one who was not created in holiness can in himself attain to spiritual perfection?"

"To spiritual perfection?" Arthur disliked the question, which he thought savoured of the Schools. Hume, Rochefoucauld, Schopenhauer were the makers of such pert questions, unpremissed, insincere, unfruitful. "None of us attain to spiritual perfection," he said, "except through the fire that purges."

Seeing Paul redden, he thought that he might have been too severe. He was inapt at intercourse, and later he would penance himself for having heedlessly disregarded another's feelings. It came to him then, for in the humbler spheres of reason he moved slowly, that some sin in early childhood might be searing the mind of his friend, making him doubt whether he could ever achieve the Higher Life with such a handicap. "Tell me," he said, "does some early trouble still vex you? Do you feel, as——"

The thought of a cloud so ominous above his own head shook Paul into speech. "No, no! It is not me!"

"You want to help someone?" Arthur asked. "Some friend? Who is it?"

"Klaus," Paul whispered.

"Klaus!"

"Klaus Gotthold. You remember how well he read the Milton this morning? You remember how Brother Walter said that he read like an Englishman?" In his confusion, trying to explain everything and to get it over as quickly as possible, he was letting his voice rise. "Supposing that he was an Englishman, or half an Englishman?"

They were passing the refectory doorway, and Heinrich, who had been to Brother Lucius for ointment for his chilblains, was just emerging.

"Who is half an Englishman?" he asked cheerfully. "I suppose you mean Klaus? He reads Milton like an Englishman—Brother Walter said so, didn't he?"

His boyish voice—he was more boyish than any of the pupils—rang out across the quadrangle, so that Klaus himself, away in the Outer Ambulatory, heard it distinctly.

Paul, thrown off his balance by the sudden intrusion, mumbled: "Yes."

"Do you mean that he was born in England, or what?" Heinrich asked. Here, at last, was something interesting to talk about.

Arthur moved away. He would have liked to help Paul, but the affair had taken an unsatisfactory turn and he could not cope with

it. He must have another quiet talk with Paul later on. He opened his book and went back to the realms where his mind moved swiftly and easily.

Before Paul could reply they were called to the Second Exercise.

"I say, Klaus," Heinrich began, meeting him in the lay vestry, "is it true, what Paul has been saying about your being half an Englishman?"

Klaus, bending to lace up his outdoor boots, asked sharply: "What was that? What did you say?"

"It must be awkward for you," Heinrich continued pleasantly. "Of course these things don't mean anything here, and of course you wouldn't be like the rest of them, but one can't help knowing that England tricked us into the war, and though I wouldn't——"

"It's a lie!" Klaus said; under his breath, for a sentence like that would be severely punished, but with a hissing emphasis that brought Heinrich to a stop. "Who told you that? Paul, did you say?"

"Yes, Paul told me. He seemed quite certain. But if you're certain you're not English, then I believe you. After all, you should know best. And anyway, I wouldn't think any the worse of you if——"

"It's a lie, I tell you!" Klaus's voice was raised now, and in his anger he did not mind who heard him, even if it was Brother Laud himself. "The English are all swine. My father's fighting them. If I was English I'd kill myself."

"Oh, all right!" To Heinrich, who found even the Abbey amusing enough to be tolerated, it seemed a trivial matter whether one were an Englishman or not, provided that one didn't behave or look like one; curiously enough—the thought struck him only at that moment—Klaus did look rather like his idea of an Englishman; he had met very few, but he had always understood that a lot of hair and a bony face were the usual characteristics; moreover, there was Klaus's bad temper; something quite un-German in the way he went off like a rocket, just when you were least expecting it; not like the smooth, growing, spreading anger that Heinrich understood; a queer fellow, one way and another. "You'd better tell Paul he's got hold of the wrong end of the stick," he said. "And then it might be a good thing to get Brother Laud to pin up your birth certificate and pedigree and things on the Observance Board."

They became aware that someone was moving behind the line of cloaks which hung on a long rack down the centre of the room.

Erich had come in, but even if they had been listening they would not have heard him, so practised was he in shifting his slight weight from heel to ball so that his stiff boots hardly creaked. He appeared now, peeping round the end of the rack, smiling.

"Oh, there you are, Klaus!" he said, giving the impression that the surprise was his. "I've been looking for you everywhere."

If Erich was not a Jew, Klaus thought, then neither were Abraham, Isaac or Jacob. The seriousness that was always on his face when any of the Brothers were about had dropped from him, and in its place was a shining, liquid affability; his hands were by his side, but it was only with conscious volition—in Klaus's quick sizing—that he refrained from rubbing them; his small eyes shone, his lips were drawn out wide into a humble smile.

He said: "I wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed your reading this morning. It is a pleasure, really it is a pleasure, to hear Milton read with a proper accent. I'm afraid that my own reading is far from——"

"Thank you," said Klaus, "but any intelligent German who puts his mind to it can render Milton's rhythm."

He swung his cloak over his shoulders and went out, Heinrich with him.

In the quadrangle twenty boys were already lining up for the ambulatory meditation. They joined the end of the file, and a minute later Erich had arrived, cloaked and serious, to make the tail. The two novices on duty, Thomas and Andrew, came towards them side by side. Thomas, having seen in one glance that all the Section was there, called the names. Andrew read out the subjects for meditation. And at funeral pace the little procession led off, Andrew four paces ahead and Thomas four in the rear; across the quadrangle, up the steps, through the Outer Ambulatory, and up another flight of steps into the Abbot's garden.

The garden was ninety yards long and sixty wide; a gravel path ran all the way round. During the first three times round Klaus nursed his anger, cursing himself and Erich by turns. He had been a fool, he thought, to exploit that odd facility of his for reading English; but then, he loved and admired Milton; art, like the worship of God, had no respect for boundaries, and even if he gave rein to hatreds that the Abbey checked so sedulously these hatreds would never spread themselves over the golden cadences that came from those English lips; why then should he be forced to pretend that he either did not understand or could not render those lines? Why should his talent be stifled simply because a quarrelsome little Jew used it as a subject for stupid innuendoes? Well, it hardly mattered. Milton

was more important than quarrelsome Jews, and though the wind was still cold the sun, in a clean sky, poured light on to the garden.

Arthur, Paul and several others walked with their heads bent, their eyes fixed on the ground; but as long as the lips were close and the eyes serious it was not compulsory to walk thus. The Abbey stood high, just below the top of a hill whose crest had been made into the garden; so that from there, with the roofs of the Abbey hardly above eye-level, you could see the country almost in a whole circle, and as the file kept turning, left and left, Klaus had the landscape stretched out to him without the need to turn his head. Gentle as the motion was, the walking gradually brought warmth to his body, and he felt the numbness slipping from his toes and fingers. The wind became an opponent, no longer an enemy, and the sunshine, paramount, gave it her own colour. The wind had the smell of trees and moss.

On the north side, which he saw as he walked away from the buildings, the ground fell steeply, rugged grazing with the bare rock showing in patches, and beyond the stream and the railway-line it rose again beneath a thick covering of pines, the pinetops marking the skyline. The high land sloped downwards as it circled west, but the railway had to burrow to get past it, the river finding its way through the narrow gorge. The slope on the south-west side of the Abbey hill was gentle, flattening by degrees into the brown plain that was edged by the Rotgebirge eleven miles away. Between, the trees decently shrouding it, lay Haltmund. Seeing it at that distance Klaus could forget that it was the little town he had been through, grey and yellow houses leaning forward over the narrow streets, a cow munching behind green railings, a little statue of a soldier at a corner of the market-place; and could see it as a dab of soft colour, put in to break the monotony of the naked stretch of country that was varied only by pasture against plough, the lines of division faint beyond the middle distance, and a grey wall that straggled without purpose from the Abbey farm down to the sheep pens. It was wide and bare, the plain of Haltmund, and it challenged him, now and whenever he saw it, to make it his own by tramping its surface with his strong, thin legs. He had been—on errands—as far as the farm, and that had whetted his appetite. An hour's hard walking, he thought, would be enough to take him as far as the mysterious line where the land turned upwards. But he was content, to-day, to let its largeness soothe him, making his irritations small by setting them against so open a background. He was pent up as they walked towards the high forest, but when the ground fell away it yielded a country fit for the play of fancy, and the very sense of a world stretching out to dim horizons,

beyond which it would stretch again to another line of hills, hills, towns, and at last the edge of the sea, exalted his loneliness and bondage into the high grandeur of a spirit undefeated. Round again, to where the roofs broke up the view. Round to the east side, where a sour smell came across the path from the stagnant water in the brick tank. Towards the forest, shielded by the ragged stone wall. Round again to face the mysterious plain, grey at its outlines but cheerful under the yellow sun, hiding adventures in little dips of the ground and little clumps of trees.

Except on the east side, where flower-pots and forks and bundles of pea-sticks stood among the leaves of last year's flowers, the beds had been cleared and dunged, leaving the garden in winter nakedness. On the lawn round the little fountain there were clumps of snowdrops, but the crocuses which Brother Peter had planted in two rows along the centre path were not out yet. If Arthur noticed the bareness of the beds it pleased him, for even flowers could be an interruption to meditation that fought towards transcendent beauties. And for Klaus, in this moment's mood, the bareness was welcome, for it was clean, and it let his mind wander with his vision, outwards. The garden would be clothed and decorated soon, a whiff in his nostrils told him; and April would be time enough, for he had learnt only now to feel the purity of the months that follow autumn. He looked forward to the flowers, but he was glad to wait for them, feeling that he could only relish beauty when he had known consciously the harder world that precludes beauty's new appearing.

In the corner near the cucumber-frames Brother Peter was bent over a pile of bulb-boxes, kneeling on the soil, industrious and futile. The novices did all that was needed in that season, but he must be in the garden, except when rain or snow prevented him, from two o'clock to four; to turn the soil over, to clip a hedge, to pull up a few stray weeds that had managed to push through on one side of the path; sometimes reading while his hands worked, always absorbed and happy, with the garden smells in his nose. He had been stooping too long—he felt his rheumatism and as the file of boys approached him he rose cautiously, turned round, and standing unsteadily on his frozen feet he shook the soil off his skirts. As the boys passed him he watched them, with his hand raised just above his shoulder in benediction. He could not smile for it would have been unseemly, but his grey eyes shone warmly with a gentle kindness, and his lips, moving almost imperceptibly, murmured: “. . . *et tecum . . . et tecum . . . et tecum.*”

Brother Peter's eyes, which looked only benevolent, were shrewd as well. They fell for just a moment on each of the faces that went

past, and each meant something to him. He had stood like that, watching, murmuring a blessing, a thousand times in the years that had gone by; and still it was not a ceremony, still every face had a meaning and an individuality. Heinrich's face, not very German, certainly not Prussian, Nordic perhaps; round, boyish and smiling; he would never make an ecclesiastic of any sort, but years afterwards, when he might be a popular doctor in Hanover or Leipzig, the Abbey would show in him; it was waiting to project itself when a part of the boyishness had gone. If the war lasted,—but that thought passed away. A solemn, empty face. Another, the face of a man struggling. Then Paul, eyes puckered and nearly closed, lips turned down; a fighter, Brother Peter thought, but no love, no love, no *love*. Then a happy face, a boy who was content to have reached thus far. Then Arthur, contemplative, calm, deeply satisfied for the moment, the hint of intenser warfare coming. Peter loved that face. Two more, boys he did not know, earnest, shallow; they would not get very far. Then after them Klaus, Klaus Gotthold. He had had talk with that boy; difficult, all right at heart, but a strange creature, quite unlike all the rest. Brother Peter suspected that there was something curious in his history, but he had not inquired—it was for the psychologists, wrong-headed and pagan scholars, to confuse themselves with such empirical researches. Klaus might make a priest if he came successfully through his puberty, which he was finding harder than most boys found it, as Peter saw clearly. At the end of the file the little Jewish boy—what was his name?—Erich. It always rejoiced Brother Peter to see Jewish boys at the Abbey, those of whom He had said: 'Father, forgive them'! But he was not certain of this one; a good record; perhaps he would do well, as the Abbey's influence gradually folded round him; at present there were no signs, nothing spiritual, no sincerity. Erich was murmuring as he passed; so quietly that Brother Peter could not hear him, but he knew that it was not a murmured prayer.

The file passed on, and Brother Peter, turning round by stages and stooping painfully, went on with his work. He closed his eyes for a moment and tried to recall the whole line of faces, that he might pray separately for each of the boys. "If they could only see the beauty that lies ahead," he thought; and murmuring: "Beauty! beauty!" he dug his stiff, cracked fingers into the sweet-smelling soil.

Into Klaus's distant thoughts came the voice that was whispering close behind, growing in his consciousness. At first he hardly heard it, then it was sound only, the words indistinct; but as it grew louder it fastened his attention and he found himself trying to make out what Erich was saying. He caught snatches at last, and he recognized

them as the titles of psalms, repeated again and again. "*Miserere mei, deus, miserere mei, eripe me de inimicis. . . .*" Then, more softly: "*. . . atque fortiter de britannis . . . exaude, deus, exaude, deus.*" As they turned a corner, Klaus shot a quick glance to see how close Erich was to Brother Thomas in the rear. Five paces, he judged. Erich seemed to know the distance by instinct, and gathering boldness he lapsed into German, his voice quieter still but quite distinct. "Defend us, O Lord, from the wicked men, not least the evil Englishmen, which approach even unto thy holy places." Then, hearing the novice's step a little closer: "*Domine, ne in furore. . . .*" Brother Thomas, satisfied, fell back to his former distance; and when he had recited Latin enough to allay suspicions, Erich began again. "Preserve us, O Lord, preserve us, I say, from the Englishmen that are sent as spies into thy holy places, even to the holy places of this our Fatherland." Then, more conversationally: "Is it not strange, O Lord, how well thy servant Klaus reads the works of thy servant Milton in the English language? Hast thou not observed, O Lord, the fluency of thy servant Klaus in the English tongue?"

Klaus stiffened his jaws and made the noise of a high wind sound in his own ears. It dimmed Erich's voice, and he thought that he could ignore the steady stream of whispered innuendo; but it still reached him. He bore it for another full minute, and then, just as they turned the corner to face the Abbey, he swung his head sharply and growled: "Ruhig!" Brother Thomas, deep in his own meditations, which at that moment were about a pair of winter underpants he had lost, noticed nothing. But at Klaus's second "Ruhig!" louder and more exasperated, he raised his head, saw the offender's nose disappearing and darted forward.

"Are you unwell, Klaus Gotthold?"

"No, Brother Thomas."

"Were you talking?"

"Yes."

"What did you say?"

"I said 'Ruhig!'"

"To whom?"

"I can't remember."

The procession still moved forward, Thomas interrogating as he walked at Klaus's side. He fell back a pace now and spoke to Erich.

"Were you talking?"

"Yes."

"What did you say?"

"I said 'Praise the Lord, all ye his saints!'"

"Why did you say that?"

"My heart was suddenly uplifted."

The novice was not sure, but he could see his easiest course. He leant forward and whispered in Klaus's ear: "We will see Brother Laud together, at the close of the Meditation."

He fell back to his station, and the incident seemed to be over. Again Klaus tried to let his thoughts and senses wander out to the wide plain, but the fretfulness that had obsessed him all day had taken firm hold again. He could think of nothing but the cramped sensation which the Meditation gave him, walking in the straight file, with Erich behind, two feet away but safe in the protection of established order, like a terrier baiting a chained bear. The day's petty irritations, piling up monstrously on the effects of a bad night, had at last produced physical headache. For a whole round Erich was silent, waiting till the novice should be off his guard again. Then, in his penetrating whisper, he let go his little burst of triumph.

"Praise be to thee, O Lord, that thou hast discomfited mine enemy!"

It seemed to Klaus that reason came to him in a flash of enlightenment. In one second he could see the opposing issues balanced against each other; on the one hand the sanctity of the Abbey life, the horrible iniquity of showing anger in an hour devoted to holy thoughts; on the other, the injustice of a spiteful child's immunity from punishment, and the absurdity of deference to the whims of a pack of skirted old poltroons. There was no doubt left in his mind as to which side reason favoured. He turned right round, and with an easy swing of his right arm, only a little shoulder-weight behind, struck a blow on Erich's chest which sent him back into the novice's arms.

Hans, country bred, was quick to apprehend animal movement, and he turned round in time to see what had happened. It was he who broke from the file first and rushed to the scene of the outrage.

"What did you do?" he roared, oblivious to the presence of everyone but Klaus. He was accustomed to the law among animals that Might is Right, but his simple ideas about human justice were different. "You got no right to hit a little boy!" he shouted.

Klaus, surprised, said: "He called me an Englishman."

"You got no right to hit him!" Hans thundered.

Brother Thomas had stepped between them, but they hardly noticed him.

"He said I was English," Klaus repeated.

Someone said: "But he is English, Erich told me all about it."

"Silence! silence!" Thomas twittered, and Andrew, coming

to his support, called in his high voice: "Silence!" But with the shouts volleying no one heard them.

"You got no right to hit him, even if you are English." Hans was red in the face and trembling with anger.

Klaus, flaring, said: "Who are you to tell me that?" and a moment later was cool again. He saw that he would have to fight Hans, and the knowledge gave him a cold, sweet pleasure. The Brothers in Novitiate were well between them now, pushing them apart, and some of the boys, more collected than the rest in the unusual emergency, had one or other by the arms. With nothing more than a dog's shudder Hans shook two of them from his huge body. "Stop! *In nomine dei*, silence!" screamed the novices. Hans dodged them, lunged forward, and caught Klaus on the forehead. Klaus was pinioned and could make no defence, but the force of the blow was diminished by Brother Andrew's shoulder against Hans' arm. Hans had got in another blow, just below the neck, before Klaus had freed himself and broken clear from the pacifying group. The two were facing each other, and the onlookers stood irresolute, helpless from lack of experience. Hans tumbled forward aiming wild blows. Klaus took two of them and dodged. That was enough. He was hurt, quite badly hurt, and the pain had stung his blood into fighting trim.

He stood ready for the next bull-rush, and stepping only a little to the left warded Hans off with a mere push of his right arm. With his left he drove at the side of Hans' head a blow straight and tight enough to make him cry out. He dodged right, at the next rush, and with his right arm drove at Hans' ear.

Hans had no time after that. He struck out wildly, realizing that he was on the defensive, and found that he could not get away. Klaus was standing at an easy distance, watching him with quick eyes, aiming a sharp blow wherever there was a space in his windmill guard, following it with another, pressing, giving him no chance to recover. Hans was out of breath. He stood up to the shower of cuts and jabs for a full minute, retreating only a step at a time across the lawn. And suddenly he gave way. Lowering his head, he clasped his arms across his chest and groaned "Enough."

Klaus stopped for a moment and stood back. "Come on!" he said. Hans realized all at once that he was free, uttered a little cry, charged forward, his arms circling; and stopped when he saw Klaus lying unconscious on the ground.

* * * * *

When he came round Klaus saw only two people; Brother Andrew, kneeling beside him, holding a flower-pot full of water

with one finger blocking the hole; and Hans, standing a little way off, sheepish, his face all bloody, blood streaming from his left ear, and one eye swelling. Brother Thomas had led the rest of the flock to safety, and Brother Peter had followed them.

He stood up. Andrew was saying something, but he did not hear him. There was a queer taste in his mouth; he recognized it presently as the taste of blood; and looking down he saw patches of blood on his clothes. He felt very sick, not from seeing the blood but because of bubbles in his chest that made his throat work wrongly. He could not manage to vomit, however, and he started to walk slowly towards the end of the garden, where the steps led down to the Ambulatory. He was unable to walk quite straight, for though he saw everything clearly the perspective was wrong, and objects near and remote varied in their distance from each other. Hans gave an arm to help him, and Brother Andrew walked on the other side, near enough to give support if necessary but leaving daylight enough to mark the infinite separation of righteousness from sin. "I think you caught your foot on something," Hans mumbled.

"You can join the others, Hans," Andrew said, when they reached the quadrangle. Hans hesitated, plainly wanting to say something, looked at Klaus with an animal's dumb, sorrowful glance, and shambled away. Andrew led the way to a narrow door in a corner of the quadrangle, unlocked it, and plunged into semi-darkness, Klaus following him two paces in the rear. In complete darkness they felt their way up the winding belfry stairs, and at the second stage, where an arrow-slit gave a white patch on the wall opposite and a twilight round two twists of the spiral, Andrew mounted two steps into an alcove and unlocked another door. He stood with his back pressed against the wall, holding the heavy door open, to let Klaus push past him into a narrow round chamber. Then, without a word, he shut the door, locked it and cautiously descended, his nervous footsteps sounding in the Penitence Chamber till he reached the door below.

On one side of the room there was a small bench, and Klaus sat down, his back supported by the stone wall. The sick feeling had not gone yet, but it was getting better, giving place to faintness. It had been a good fight, he thought, hard and sharp enough to clear away the stagnant discontents that had been inside him all day, and leaving no bad feeling; and with his bruises still tingling warmly, the taste of blood still in his mouth, he could enjoy the glory of it. When the faint feeling passed he would enjoy it more.

Except for the bench, there was no furniture in the Penitence Chamber; only a bell rope and a Crucifix hung on the wall broke

the bareness. A single window, high up on the part of the wall that faced the door, lighted the room. Originally there had been only an arrow-slit, but a monk of the sixteenth century who had spent all his life in the room had enlarged it, requiring light for his devotions, into an aperture eighteen inches wide. The same bar that he had inserted top to bottom for fear of weakening the structure was still in position, and the aperture was still without glass; so that the room, without artificial heating, was bitterly cold in the winter, and often wet from the rain driving in though the walls admitted no damp; and except when the day was brightest outside it was in a brown darkness. It had the indefinite odour of ancient stone. Klaus sat still, with his eyes on the crucifix.

Presently he heard footsteps ascending, and Brother Lucius came in, carrying a little basin of hot water, a sponge, bandages, and a pot of vegetable ointment. Directly he had put down the basin he laid his finger on his lips, showing that he had been instructed to keep silence. The kindness had gone from his face, and his mouth was closed tightly, his eyes solemn. Quietly and adroitly, with his long, nervous, skilful fingers, he bathed, anointed and bandaged. When it was done he turned without meeting Klaus's eyes, and went to the door. But there he paused, and slipping his hand into a fold of his garments took out a little parcel which he placed on the ground close to the wall. Without turning his head he went out and locked the door.

In the comfort that the bandages gave him Klaus felt for the first time the pang of his disgrace. He did not look to see what was in the parcel.

It was another half-hour, or so it seemed, before footsteps again sounded on the stairs, and a novice, standing in the doorway, beckoned him to follow.

From the sun not far above the horizon a yellow light came almost horizontally through the narrow windows of the Abbot's chamber; making, with the simple objects it contained, a grotesque picture out of that simple room. The little oratory, which joined the room in one of its longer sides, was shut off by a heavy curtain; and the room itself was almost as bare as the Penitence Chamber, having only a table with writing materials, an oak chair, a deal wardrobe and a single case of books. But the long shadows, reaching to and bending up the far wall, crossed over the beams at sharp angles, patterning the flat surfaces into a fantastic array of stripes and diamonds.

The five men were near the window; the two novices, stiff and motionless as dummy figures, standing against the wall; Brother Laud, seated, a little way in front; in front of him, sitting at a table with his Writer at his side, the Abbot, his face turned a little towards the window so that only a quarter of it was in shadow, the size and shape of his nose and chin accentuated. His position, his white robe, the way that his face caught the light all made him the centre of the tableau, though his chin pointed downwards and his eyes, almost covered by the heavy lids, were fastened on the table. He would have held Klaus's eyes had he been in the far corner; not only because the pupils saw him rarely, but because there was in his lined face the miracle of stillness.

The novice who had summoned Klaus had slipped away, and he stood alone, a yard in front of the door, waiting.

The old man in white robes with the yellow sun shining on his high, bald head had been Abbot for nearly forty years; and so far as it was known, he was eighty-eight years of age. Son of a Prussian lordling, he had been a soldier and had crossed the five oceans. He had won honour in the Siege of Paris. He had fought five duels, had owned horses, had gambled away his money, had worked a passage to Australia, had lived by keeping women in Valparaiso. He had been thrown, dead-drunk, into a coasting vessel which had taken him to Panama; then, sailing as ship's cook to Florida and from there reaching Philadelphia on foot, a forty-eight days' tramp, he had made his way back to Europe; had gradually regained his former status as a gentleman; had entered politics; and just as the doors to high position were opening he had left Berlin, without a word to his friends; had arrived on foot at the Abbey, where he had fallen at the feet of the Brothers, faint with hunger and exhaustion, weeping tears of penitence; had been admitted, and had never again passed its walls. His head was bent down a little as he sat with his clasped hands resting on the table, and his body leant slightly forward; but it was only a pose of stillness, not of rest. He breathed deeply, and his breath made a curious snoring sound as his nostrils expelled it, but none of his limbs trembled, and except for the motions of breathing his body was rigid, statuesque. Even when he wished to relax his spirit, which his will had mastered till it was the pattern of his strongest self, held the muscles in an easy tension. When he walked, as he still did sometimes in his garden, he was almost erect, and though his Writer walked close behind he gave the Abbot no support. Only he, and Brother Lucius who from time to time attended him, knew that he was dying. To Klaus, watching him with frightened eyes, he seemed like the figure of God.

He said: "Come nearer, *fili*," and Klaus went a step forward.

The novices standing back against the wall hardly breathed. Only Brother Laud's foot tapped, gently, repeatedly, and from far away the sound of the Brothers chanting Vespers came through the window into the quiet room, blended with the soft smell of approaching nightfall. Klaus shivered, for it was cold in the room. The first comfort that the bandages had given him had passed, and now his body seemed to be covered with little patches of soreness and throbbing aches, which combined with the coldness to make him wretched. He was frightened, but he felt that fear was only a small part of his discomfort.

For a whole minute no one spoke. The Abbot's Writer held his pen over a sheet of paper, ready to dance into action when the word was given. The novices, hands folded, gazed at the floor. Surreptitiously Brother Laud lifted one hand to pick his nose with the forefinger. Klaus did not see the action. He could only keep his eyes fastened on the Abbot, who was awake but breathed like one sleeping.

At last the Abbot turned his head, nodded slightly and came back to his former position. The Writer dipped his pen again. Brother Laud pulled his chair an inch forward.

"Holy Father in God," Brother Laud recited, "the boy who stands before you is named Klaus Gotthold, and is one of the pupils placed in my charge for instruction in the Holy Christian Faith of the Catholic Church as practised by our Holy Order, and in other subjects of general learning, and for Christian discipline, that he may in due course be admitted to take the Vows of the Brotherhood, or practise some other vocation in the spirit of Christian charity in which he has here been instructed.

"I have brought this boy before you for your special correction and disciplining, he having been guilty of grievous sin.

"In that, on this day set apart for special Observance and Holy Meditation in Commemoration of the Death and Martyrdom of the Blessed Saint Grace of Trasimena, he has defied authority. . . ."

Klaus had already lost interest in the recitation. Brother Laud, it seemed, was stating in an exceedingly complicated way that he had been late for the First Exercise and had lost his temper during the Ambulatory Meditation. He recognized a sentence here and there as a florid description of his misdemeanours, but since that was nothing on which he could argue it was not worth his while to give particular attention. He still watched the Abbot, whose eyes remained fixed on the table, while the Writer scribbled frantically on his pad. A fine old man, Klaus thought, with his big white eyebrows, his

scholarly forehead, his long nose and chin like the prow of a ship. Rather a terrifying old man, if he were suddenly to rise to his feet and pronounce judgment. Was he listening intently, taking in every word Brother Laud said? Or was he rather weary of the length of it, impatient of the circumlocution with which each detail was set forth? The thought came to Klaus by degrees, as Brother Laud's voice rolled out one polysyllable after another, that perhaps he and the Abbot were in sympathy. They seemed to be alone together, though their eyes did not meet. Brother Laud was intent on his recitation. The two novices, remote and with eyes downcast, were out of the picture. The Writer was a machine, impersonal, busily scratching. It would not be inappropriate, Klaus thought suddenly, if he and the Abbot quietly retired, leaving the others to finish the ceremony they were treating so importantly. But perhaps the old man was as much in earnest as they were, only waiting for the end of the harangue to stumble to his feet, white with anger, and denounce him as an impenitent sinner, unworthy of the Abbey, a wolf in the sheepfold, a devil among the angels. He listened with growing impatience.

" . . . and not content with this cowardly and unchristian assault upon one of his fellows, he forthwith set upon another, heedless of the dissuasion of the Brothers in Novitiate, and but for the greater strength of the second boy, who was forced to defend himself, would most like have succeeded in injuring him as severely. In attempting to separate the combatants . . ."

At last the Abbot raised his hand to bid silence. For the first time he opened his eyes wide and looked at Klaus.

"This is all quite true?" he asked.

Klaus, on the point of saying "yes," hesitated. That voice demanded truth, truth only.

"No, Holy Father," he said quietly.

The Abbot was neither shocked nor surprised.

"You mean——?"

"I didn't attack Hans. He attacked me."

"And the first boy?"

"Yes, I attacked him."

There was a silence. Brother Laud, having completed his summary of the evidence, seemed to withdraw from the court. He sat staring at the wall in front of him, breathing rather hard from the effort that the speech had cost him, his chin caught in, his upper lip stretched down to hide the lower, his whole face parodying its own lean, grey asceticism.

"Had you a reason for attacking the first boy?" the Abbot asked.

"Yes, Holy Father."

"Are you sorry, now?"

"No, Holy Father."

"No?"

"No, Holy Father."

The first 'no' had sent a shiver of horror through the four assistants. Even the Writer put down his pen and for the first time looked with an almost human interest at the culprit. Brother Laud's face had suddenly grown whiter. Only the Abbot was not surprised. He held Klaus's eyes with his own faint blue ones, at once enquiring for and acknowledging truth of fact.

"But you will tell Erich that you are sorry?" he said.

That he could hardly refuse; but the horror of the Brothers had goaded him, and a wave of contempt for their pious faces and horrified eyes made him hostile. He wanted to be virtuous for the Abbot's sake, but the desire to show the old man his spirit was greater. In the face of a greatness he admired he wanted above all to be great. When he spoke his voice was thin and unnatural, but he pronounced the words carefully.

"I will apologize, Holy Father, but he must apologize first."

The Abbot leant forward, blinked once, and focussed his eyes afresh.

"That is not Christ's spirit," he said. Then: "Tell me, what harm did he do you?"

"He called me an Englishman."

A smile flickered in the old man's eyes, but it was gone before Klaus saw it.

"I have known many Englishmen," he said slowly, "amongst them brave men, great men, and good men."

Klaus was silent. He waited for the Abbot to reason with him, but the Abbot did not mean to prolong the trial. He moved a little in his chair to shake off the cramp that was beginning to grip him, and then spoke quietly, addressing himself to the offender as if no one else were present.

"You have done wrong, Klaus, and before you can enter again on your Christian life you must seek God's forgiveness by Confession, by Penitence, by Priestly Absolution. But you are not ready to seek forgiveness in the name of Him who bade his disciples turn the other cheek to those who smote them. Your body must be chastised before your spirit can be brought to repentance. You will be segregated from your fellows and made to fast until you have shown humility. You can go now."

Klaus wavered. He had made his gesture, and he wanted now to

get right with the old man who spoke so quietly, whose slow, exact speech seemed to come from a mind which had reasoned everything, which saw every aspect of the conflict, weighing every emotion against the vast weight of his experience, measuring stubbornness against the final will. Before that authority his obstinacy was the gesture of a pygmy matched against a giant. Brother Laud he would have defied till defiance grew monotonous, but to the Abbot he would have surrendered. He turned, however, having bowed perfunctorily, and left the room. Outside, the novice who had summoned him was waiting.

It was quite dark before a novice came to the Penitence Chamber with a candle, a small warming-stove, a pile of blankets, some bread and a glass of water. He dropped the blankets just inside the door, put the bread and water on the bench, and lit the stove from the candle.

"I shall bring you more food at midday to-morrow," he said as he was going. "I am to tell you that if you have decided upon repentance and humility before ten o'clock has struck you are to pull that bell-cord. You will then be examined."

He retired, locking the door behind him.

Directly the door closed Klaus seized one of the four lumps of bread, tore it in half, and crammed the whole of one half into his mouth. In a few seconds he had swallowed it and started on the next. When the second whole lump had gone his hunger was still as strong as ever. He broke the third into smaller pieces and tried to hold each one in his mouth, pushing it round and round with his tongue, for a whole minute before he bit it; but he found that the method gave him no value from the food, and the last two pieces he ate normally, munching them vigorously but making no pause between the mouthfuls. The edge was taken off his appetite now, and he had still one more lump. He tore it carefully into quite small pieces and starting with those which were entirely crumb he ate one, paused for a few seconds, then another, another long pause, then, rashly, two together. He managed to make the crust pieces last longer. When he had finished he was thirsty and drank off the water in one draught. He was still hungry. It must be about six o'clock he thought. Eighteen hours to wait. Perhaps they would give him some soup then.

He brought the stove quite close to the bench and began to warm each of his limbs in turn, first one foot, then one hand. He was thus engaged, and starting once more to review in order all the events of

the day, when there were sounds again from far down the stairs outside. Someone was beginning to ascend very slowly, bringing his feet together on each step before attempting the next. For an interval the sound stopped altogether, and Klaus thought that he must have imagined it; but presently he heard it again, slow, uncertain steps, but coming nearer. At last they were outside the door, and someone was fumbling for the keyhole. When the door opened Brother Peter stood on the threshold, holding a flickering candle and panting from the exertion. He came forward without speaking.

Klaus rose to his feet and stood awkwardly, finding that there was nowhere that he could put his hands. He had taken off his boots, and the sensation of awkwardness was increased by the sight, as he looked down, of big holes in both his stockings. Brother Peter seemed to be looking at the holes, while in truth he was only avoiding Klaus's eyes. Silently he gave him a piece of paper, turned and went back to the door. He was outside, and had pulled the door nearly to, when his head appeared again. Just for a second he looked full at Klaus. "*Dominus tecum*," he whispered, and crept away.

Klaus listened to his retreating steps, and when he had heard the door at the bottom of the stairs shut he unfolded the paper. It was a curious document. At the top was written in bold capitals: "To Klaus Gotthold." Half an inch below, in a sprawling childish hand, came the words: "I have seen Erich. He is not grievously hurt, and prays God to forgive you as he forgives you." Below this the writing grew smaller, and some of the lines ran into each other. By degrees Klaus read them. "I have written out some prayers which will help you. Think first, clear your mind, give your mind to God, and when he bids you, pray. Say each of the prayers again and again until your soul itself begins to utter them." The prayers which followed were written in both Latin and German. The writing was still worse here, the lines mounting and sagging, the words joined together, interpolations colliding with the lines above or squeezed into the margin and overrunning the edge of the paper; but Klaus recognized the prayers and knew them—prayers of St. Ignatius, St. Francis and St. Maud. At the bottom was written boldly: "Think of Jesus, how He suffered, how humble He was." And then, largest of all—"Jesus, Jesus, Jesus."

He refolded the paper and tucked it under the empty glass. He would read it again presently, but for the moment he wished to forget it. It had the surprising effect of making him weep. Though he could not quite analyse the reason, there was something in the way Peter had come in, in the way that the paper was addressed, with no introduction but his name at the top, that gave new poignancy to his

humiliation. For the first time he felt that his offence was not merely against the Abbey, that it was Sin. And as yet his spirit would not tolerate humiliation. The happiness of the battle had not quite gone, for a gentle pain still reminded him of the glory of it; and as for contrition, he had been lowly enough before the Abbot. In days to come he would think affectionately of Brother Peter's kindness in bringing him spiritual solace; perhaps in a few minutes he would try to say some of the prayers; for the present he would deliberately see Brother Peter as an old fool who made a religious mountain out of a secular molehill.

He put on his boots again, and falling at once and unconsciously into the prisoner's habit began to pace the room, taking the full twelve feet between the door and the wall opposite. The physical stimulus was enough to take his mind out of the plane where an elderly sentimentalist would fill it with emotions and religion. Feeling his legs he knew that he was young and strong; religion, of Brother Peter's sort, was for old and tottering people, at best for Lenten exercises, when every good Catholic set his mind apart for such contemplations. At this moment he was anxious to dwell upon Brother Laud. He had seen Brother Laud's face just as he was being dismissed by the Abbot, and he had noticed his tongue, the end of it just visible between the thin dry lips; the plainest gesture of satisfaction that Brother Laud would ever make. A cat's face, he thought, trying to sharpen the image in his memory; the sardonic, quietly triumphant expression of a cat with a mouse lying—for the moment free—between its paws. As he played with the simile he found that the two novices, Brother Thomas and Brother Andrew, would fit into it neatly enough. Kittens watching their clever mother making triumph with a wounded mouse. He had noticed them, too, just as his glance swept round when he turned towards the door; their eyes raised at last to stare at him; rather awed by the high justice of the verdict, but relishing the sinner's downfall with the lip-licking, pious satisfaction of the nasty little prophets at the end of the Old Testament. Dreaming, no doubt, of the glorious days to come when they might torture a mouse with all the skill and polish that mother-cat was showing off now.

Klaus smiled, sniffed sarcastically, and became angrier as he thought how far wide of the mark his simile was. He was not that sort of mouse. They could have done nothing to him without the Abbot, and he was an old gentleman whose three score and ten years had elapsed when Klaus was still in the nursery. The Abbot, of course, was worthy of respect. A little chat with him alone, and Klaus would have apologized, and done penance, and cleared up the whole matter. But that would have been dancing to the tune Brother Laud and his satellites were playing. No, he had come out of it

better than that. He had at least shown them that he could not be bullied into immediate surrender. In time he would have to give in, but not now; and not before ten o'clock.

Fantastic, that he should play mouse for the pleasure of cats so skinny and pusillanimous. If he had devoted to Brother Laud just one of the blows that at this moment must be hurting Hans there would have been a new Master of the Pupils. As for Thomas and Andrew, he had only to knock their heads together and their teeth would fall out. Then why had he done as he was told, and allowed himself to be shut up? He had not been dragged in chains to the Penitence Chamber—he had been led there by a thin, lame boy not five years older than himself. He knew the history of that boy, how Brother Lucius had picked him up, a puny child lying half-starved in the streets, and had restored to him by unwearying patience enough health and sanity to be useful and tolerably happy in the Abbey. He still looked frightened, had not yet lost altogether the marks of early ill-feeding; a pinched grey face, spotty on the forehead, a crippled body always smaller than the clothes he was wearing, the neck of a plucked hen. Klaus had always felt sorry for him, pitying gently his inferiority of mind and body and birth. Even now he bore him no grudge, but the thought of being led to imprisonment by such a creature fanned the flame of his scorn and anger. They were a pack of women, he told himself. He had met few women besides his mother in the course of his life, and the word meant nothing to him but feeble inferiority cloaking itself in the deference shown to the sex by custom. Creatures with thin arms and thin voices, always commanding obedience, muting defiance with the sanctity of their petticoats. He had always obeyed them in his childhood, and now, for reasons not dissimilar, he obeyed the old women in the Abbey, beardless beings with thin faces who shuffled from chapel to refectory with their thin legs swathed in heavy fustian. He had taken the world at its own valuation, instead of measuring it by his own strength. He had always thought of St. Francis and never of St. Paul. St. Paul had been thrown into prison by Roman soldiers, not by a deformed novice who shaved himself as an Easter Day celebration.

The little strength that the bread had given him was running out too fast, and he sat down to enjoy his meditations in greater comfort. As his eyes roved dismally he caught sight of a dark object near the door, and it was only when he had picked it up that he remembered how Brother Lucius had thrown it there. It was quite a small parcel, clumsily wrapped in a piece of rag and secured by a tape tied in a bow. He undid it eagerly, hoping that it might possibly be food; but the weight had already warned him, and when he pulled away the last

wrapping he found an old, broken clock of the type that was sold in hundreds in the bazaars along the Seilestrasse. It had lost its glass, and a note written on a minute scrap of paper was tucked under the hands. "You may like to try and repair this. It will be an occupation. L." Attached by a piece of cord were the tools that Brother Lucius had supposed necessary, a small screwdriver, a penknife and a rusty pair of forceps.

Excitement and hunger had made Klaus sensitive, and this new token of kindness, so thoughtfully planned, so decently bestowed, again made his eyes fill with tears. In the loneliness of imprisonment he desired to feel the dignity of loneliness, to nourish the bitter spirit of defiance which should ennoble a man in banishment. He had no pity for himself, only the hard, glowing sense of injustice; the compassion of these others, who saw him as a culprit miserably undergoing a just chastisement, could not promote self-pity, but they forced upon him an emotion which was kin to it. They showed him a love that was like divine love, compelling response, and his pride demanded hatred. They stretched out their hands to him, and they belonged to the other camp.

He pitched the clock on to the floor, the tools with it. He meant to repair it later if it could be repaired, a service to repay a kindness, but in his present mood he would not have had the skill even had he tried. Having pushed it with his foot towards the wall, he got up and began to walk again, unreflectively counting his paces, while he drove his mind back to the scene of the audience. His mind's eye rested on the Abbot and he forced it away. The part that the Abbot had played upset his assurance; he had not questioned the statement about Erich's insults, had simply suggested that a mind as great as his own would not have heeded them; the Abbot, of course, was a monastic who by reason of his vocation could not appreciate, much less be sympathetic with, the proper German feeling that must be in the breasts even of those who were being taught to serve God only; nevertheless, there remained the doubt whether a being so human as well as so wise could know all the facts of the case and yet make a judgment that was categorically wrong; but it might be so, for even at his early stage in scholarship Klaus knew that the whole history of human dialectic was built up upon doctrines wrongly held by great philosophers. Leaving the ground where his mind danced among the lights and shades and into all the crannies, he played his imagination upon Brother Laud once more, and finding that his picture of that long sanctimonious face had already grown weaker he set himself to conjure a new scene; wherein the Abbot had ordained that the rights and the wrongs of the case must be tried by ordeal of combat, and he faced

the three men together, Brother Laud and his gaping novices, with his right hand tied behind his back and only his left to ward their feeble attack and to rain blows upon each in turn. But the pieces would not fit together. The fatigue of his body seemed to have crept into his brain, and his imagination worked slowly and clumsily when he tried to make the picture he wanted. Even when it was done, when he had grasped the ensemble for a moment, he found it only meaningless, so ludicrous that he was near to mocking his own boyish passion with a gust of laughter. He did, indeed, allow his lips to smile for a moment; and scowled again, realizing how obvious the truth was—that the weakness opposing him was more subtle and formidable than strength. There was no solution and no relief for his fury. In desperation he ran against the wall and struck his fists against it until they were torn and bruised.

When he ceased labouring to furnish his wrath with exact material it flowed more easily and pleasantly. He sat down at last, not on the bench but for greater comfort on the floor with his back against the wall, the stove close so that he was warm physically; and allowed his passion against all the weak beings who opposed him to flow over his spirit in warm waves, till he came near to a savage exaltation, and his mind, without urging his body to action, triumphed gloriously over his enemies. He had no plan of action, but in the morning a plan would come. When he was not in the Abbot's presence the Abbot would no longer regard him as a naughty boy. Klaus would show somehow—the morning would shape his gestures—that he was already in his manhood and that the governance of lean monks and skinny novices was no longer a rope thick enough to bind him. He got up and walked up and down a few times more, then dropped on to the bench and took off his boots. It occurred to him to make his bed now, to get the job over, and he clumsily spread out the blankets. A few more paces backwards and forwards, and he decided to lie down. It was too early to go to sleep, but he would rest for a while and enjoy his thoughts in greater comfort. Before ten o'clock he might decide to ring the bell and demand another interview with the Abbot. He pulled the top blanket over him, for it was not very warm lying on the floor. He was dimly conscious of the bell ringing for the Fourth Exercise; and presently fell asleep.

The candle had burnt itself out when he woke, and the stove, by its smell and clicking, showed that it would not last much longer. On the wall above him the moon made a silver-blue rectangle.

The soreness of his hip-bone resting on the hard floor had woken

him, and when he had turned into a less uncomfortable position he tried to sleep again. But the strangeness of his surroundings and the continued discomfort kept him awake, so that presently he raised his head and supported it on one hand, his elbow propped on the under-blanket. Limp and half-wakeful, he watched the patch of moonlight with one open eye, listening to the close silence.

When the clock struck it startled him, actually shaking his body as the first stroke crashed against the utter quietness. It struck twice, and the sound died slowly, leaving at last a silence intensified. It was a queer, unpleasant hour to be awake.

When a few minutes had passed the stove made a little guttural noise and went out, leaving the rectangle of moonshine the only light in the room. Klaus had had little experience of such darkness, still less of so profound a silence. The smallest of his movements seemed to intrude upon it, and he had the sensation of hiding, the fictitious but potent fear that any sound, a cough or rustle or even the sound of his breathing would betray him. He moved cautiously into a better position and held himself absolutely still. Then he thought he heard a noise, quite close to him, a faint, gentle tapping; quite regular, ceasing for a few seconds and then continuing unbroken for a full minute.

He tried to believe that it was imagination, and dropping his head he covered both ears with the blanket. He reminded himself how thick were the walls which surrounded him. But to pay no attention was more unbearable than listening, and soon he uncovered one ear, twisting his finger in the hole to make sure that his imagination could not deceive him. There was silence for a few moments, dead silence, then the noise began again, quite unmistakably, like the sound of a finger-nail tapping a wooden table. It grew no louder, but as it continued it seemed more distinct, sharper and more suggestive of animate agency. He tried to subdue his heart-beats so that he could listen more attentively.

As far as he could remember there were no cracks in the walls or floor, but he had not examined them carefully. The walls were thick enough to all appearance, a foot in thickness, he would have guessed, but the Abbey had stood for many centuries and it might be that they had crumbled away inside, making a haunt for every kind of vermin. He could not connect the noise with any creature he had known or heard of, and with so little fact to work upon his sleepy mind began to rove wildly, conjuring unknown creatures that might have survived—or even achieved their racial distinction—solely within these hidden precincts. He longed to be asleep again, and he thought now that his discomfort would be no barrier to sleep if only the tapping and the uneasiness it engendered were to cease. But the noise went

on, and now that he had surrendered to little fears he found larger ones arraying themselves around him.

Whatever made the tapping could only be small, and it would do him no harm, he told himself, if a mouse or some kind of beetle ran across his face; only women were frightened of such creatures; but in this darkness and at such a ghostly hour the experience would be unpleasant, more than unpleasant if a little army of beetles, attracted by the warmth, swarmed through a crack in the wall and all over his body. It might, moreover, be rats, and he fancied he had heard it said that a rat will go straight for a man's throat, fastening its little teeth so tight that nothing will shake it off. It would not be easy to ward off an attack like that in the darkness, where an animal's lighted eye saw clearly and he saw nothing. It was rubbish, perhaps. But if it were an army of rats? There was a story about a bishop—he could not remember the details, but what he could recall was enough to send a little shudder through his body. If anything did happen there was no means of summoning help. He could shout till he was hoarse, but no sound would penetrate the surrounding walls, and it was unlikely that enough would escape through the window to filter through other windows, far off, where the novices were sleeping. If he rang the bell it would only sound somewhere in the kitchens or in the manciple's day-room—he knew that no one slept in any of the rooms beneath. A scullery-boy might hear it from the lower servants' dormitory, but as like as not he would pay no attention.

The tapping stopped while the realization of helplessness was taking possession of his mind; and with one sense unoccupied others became active. He thought he could smell smoke. It was only a faint smell, but enough to put his cloudy imagination on a new trail, and the idea of fire began to obsess him. Old buildings caught fire easily. He had read of such fires in newspapers, and had actually seen, from the window of a railway-carriage, the gutted remains of the Hansenburger Schloss shortly after the conflagration. His wonder at the power of fire over a building so massive and solid had fixed the picture in his memory, and now in a flash he could see the Abbey in the same ruination, charred walls guarding emptiness. If such a fire were to occur to-night, would they remember a solitary pupil in the Penitence Chamber? Or would he stand beating the door with the smoke growing thick in the room and the flames crackling beneath him? At that moment he resolved that as soon as daylight came he would ring the bell and agree to ask Erich's pardon.

He sniffed. The smell of smoke was no stronger, but undoubtedly it was there. The tapping had started again.

Something touched the back of his neck, lightly as a feather's point, and throwing off the blanket he jumped to his feet. The blanket swept over the bench and knocked the glass on to the floor. He took a step forward and his eye caught his shadow against the patch on the wall. Suddenly unnerved he gave a shout, and the walls echoed it. He stood still, trembling. In the faint glimmer of moonlight that the wall reflected into the room he could just see the blankets he had thrown aside as a patch of deeper darkness; and he thought that the patch moved.

For a full three seconds he could not make himself move. Cold as he was, he could feel little drops of sweat running down, inside his skin as it seemed, from his shoulders towards his waist. He had known fear before; but it was fear of some definite danger and he had relished it, a cool pricking of the temples and a liquid coldness pouring upwards from his thighs to his neck. Now, when lonely imprisonment and darkness had combined in a strange chemistry to make a new sensation, unreal in essence yet so real in power that its presence seemed to breathe upon him, the horror was large enough to stun his reason. He could only stand and endure it, waiting, petrified, for the thing he feared to become concrete, and in its physical grip release him from the ghostly ambush. He moved at last, almost with volition as if walking in sleep, stealthily as if pursued, towards the door. A yard away from the door he partially recovered self-control and sprang towards it; seized the latch, jerked it up, and tugged. Without resistance the door opened.

He had tugged in a vague hope of breaking the lock, and when the door yielded his first thought was that someone who had just unlocked it was pushing at the same moment. He stepped back and peered into the black darkness outside. He could see no one, but it was easy to imagine that someone was standing back, waiting to see what he would do, and his mind projected the image of a monk's cloaked figure so vividly into the blank pit that it almost shaped itself before his physical eyes, and he whispered: "Who's that?" When he had waited and received no answer he stretched out his hand and leaned forward; advanced a pace and stretched out farther still, dreading the first touch and almost as frightened of touching nothing. His hand met no resistance, and when, as he still advanced, the pressure of the wall against his right elbow ceased, he slipped sideways, turned and began to run down the stairs as fast as the darkness and the uncertain steps would let him.

In the spreading noise which his clumsy footsteps made he fancied that he heard someone following him, but he did not pause to listen. With his arm scraping along the wall he plunged down recklessly,

often slipping and stumbling, conscious of a supreme fear—that the door at the bottom should be locked. But when he met it, with a physical and mental shock, for he had not expected it so soon, the door was on the latch. He pulled it open, one arm held out behind to ward off a pursuer, wriggled round, and found himself in the open quadrangle.

He shut the door behind him, careful now to make as little noise as possible, and with the fear of the invisible pursuer still upon him held the iron handle firmly. He had come nearer to the natural world. The silence was awesome, and in the moonlight the quadrangle might have been a stage-setting, unreal, but in its outline so close a copy of the quadrangle he knew that through the weirdness of its presentation he could still see it as a place of human occupation, soothing in its familiarity. Reason spoke strongly enough, after its interval of silence, to tell him that in a few hours' time the figures of every day would be moving to and fro across the stage now darkened, that life would awake and resume its normality. But he kept hold of the iron handle. The air, clean and sweet after the stone-odoured dankness of the Penitence Chamber, unstirred by wind, so that its coldness did not press too hard on his skin, was sharp in his nostrils. For the first time since he had woken the excitement that still vibrated in his chest assumed a slightly pleasurable colour, and he found the beginning of zest in the very grotesqueness of the limelighted imitation world in which he stood alone. The moon itself, stiff and polished, was only a part of the backcloth; but the stars, flickering, were more real than the quadrangle itself, and in their witnessing presence he felt less lonely, as if God were watching him. If there had not been walls all round his fear would have fallen from him, and he would have been content, despite the coldness of his body, to stay contemplating the hard, clear stillness of an hour he had not found before. But behind those walls people were sleeping; in any of those windows someone might be sitting, invisible, watching.

With those imagined eyes upon him he began to think practically; slowly, as the horror of the darkness behind was quieted by the sense of access to space unlimited; and as the moonlight itself became gradually familiar, the shock of its eerie illumination ceased to hold him spellbound. The sense of freedom was illusory, for he was bound by high walls, gates and buildings. Did he want to be entirely free, or was he content simply to have escaped from the pressing walls and the frightening narrowness of the Penitence Chamber? Considering the question, he decided that he wanted companionship; to lie down on his own bed in the long line in the pupils' dormitory; even to stand before Brother Laud and listen to his wrathful upbraiding, drawing

comfort from the unmysterious reality of human speech. But as he thought of Brother Laud he saw again the narrow head, the long goose-like face, the narrow lips always pushed into a little pout of school-dame's asperity. He thought of the glint of triumph, quiet, pious triumph, in Brother Laud's cold eyes as the Abbot pronounced sentence. And the spirit of rebellion, mortified, struggled again to move him.

He could get away. Over the wall. He had seen a hole that would do for foothold. He could stretch to the top from there, pull himself up, swing round on his belly, drop down to the other side, clear and away to the valley. Then let the holy Brothers chase him, holding their skirts as they ran! He smiled as he thought of them running and shouting, calling him back to be a good pupil under their maternal care. "Klaus! Klaus! Come back and apologize to poor Erich! Come and be locked up till you're sorry and then do penance. We shan't hurt you. Come back! Come back!" Old women, the pack of them, and the dithering pupils who obeyed them were not much better. Hans was too heavy and loutish to run. Paul, Arthur, would they scramble after him if they saw him scaling the wall? With the plain stretching in front and his legs underneath him—they felt watery now but they would stiffen when put into action—he would have his own place with the herd. Old men, lean novices, downtrodden pupils—he would show them who Klaus Gotthold was; Klaus Gotthold that they had called an Englishman; Klaus Gotthold that they had locked up in the Penitence Chamber.

He was still standing motionless, working up the courage that he needed for the swift dash to the wall and the scramble over. It wouldn't be easy, that wall—it would mean a clean jump to the foothold, several, before his foot found it, and luck enough to find a fist-grip that would steady him till he had stretched up to the top edge. He hadn't quite recovered from the scare—a childish scare he thought it now—of running down the stairs with the feeling of someone behind. He must have just a few more seconds to collect himself, to be finally persuaded that flight was better than submission. The pause gave opportunity for his thoughts to run again, and as he warmed his courage with the ease of the first stage in his flight he wondered for the first time why the door of his prison had been left open. It was odd that the novice, trained to such punctiliousness in performing the details of his secular as well as his spiritual duties, should have omitted to turn the key. It was, surely, the novice who had last—and then he remembered. It was Brother Peter who had been the last to visit him in the Penitence Chamber.

So like Brother Peter to overlook such a duty! No doubt he had

promised Brother Laud, who would have given him permission, to make sure that the prison was secure when he left it. Probably he had muttered the words: "I must lock the door again," over and over as he had groped up the dark staircase; and then, his soft heart overcome by the spectacle of Klaus's disgrace, had thought no more about it, and gone away with only the prisoner in his mind. Brother Laud's anger would know no bounds when he found out. He would report the matter to the Abbot, and might even suggest that Peter had allowed his pity so far to move him as to make him deliberately release the culprit. Not that Peter would be much affected by Brother Laud's anger, or even a rebuke from the Abbot; he had suffered remorse for weightier sins than petty carelessness; but the knowledge that a boy he had befriended had taken advantage of his carelessness would come as a crushing blow to the old man. He was one of the petticoated mob, Brother Peter, as soft and futile as the rest; but there was, for Klaus, less of the woman in him, more of the child. He had no airs, no pretentious authority. His weakness was of a kind hard to strike at, as different from Brother Laud's lean frailty as a puppy's from a wasp's. And beneath the hard crust, newly formed, of his contempt for the Abbey and all its ordinances, there remained in Klaus a lingering respect, mixed of tenderness and awe, for the white flame which it enshrined; the flame that had lately warmed him and that he saw burning most fiercely in Brother Peter's mild and clouded eyes.

His thoughts running fast in the new direction, he tried to find a compromise. The key might be hanging on a nail somewhere inside. If he could find it he would creep back—yes, it was worth facing the dark stairs again—lock the door, and replace the key before he made his escape. It would look then as if he had got out by some other way. But there was only one other way, the window, and that had looked impossible. Still, he would look again. And then logic pointed to the obvious solution. If escape through the window was possible, that was how he must do it, and if he left sufficient evidence the fact that the door was unlocked would lose all its importance. He hardly waited to let his ideas crystallize into a formal resolution; and turning round, he cautiously opened the door, using both hands to prevent the latch clicking. The dread of darkness returned as he gazed into it, and again his mind made images out of the pliant opacity. If he had waited for courage it would have failed him, and he went inside quickly and pushed to the door. The noise his first steps made had comforted instead of alarming him; noise, he decided, was after all his best weapon against imagined terrors, and he started to mount the steps boldly, banging his feet on the stone and holding his body erect, as if to claim lawful passage. With his

nerves thus tightened his courage increased, and he was ashamed to think of his headlong flight. He could remember now that a few yards away the open sky hung serenely over the quiet quadrangle, where the air was too cold for the breathing of mental bogies. Perhaps, after all, he would stay in the Penitence Room till morning. He had learnt how to deal with darkness.

In this triumphant ascent he went past the door, and it was only after much uncertain groping that he found the alcove. He had left the door open, and for a moment he was surprised to find it shut. He realized then that it would have shut by its own weight, but he could not remember hearing the bang. The slight doubt, the sense of something unexplained, was enough to break down the thin wall of courage he had built around him. The figure he had seemed to see when he first opened the door might actually have been there waiting; might have slipped past him, held the door open, and then gone inside to await his return. He did not trouble to ask what would have been the reason for this manœuvre; sufficient that it might have happened, and that someone might be there, inside.

He raised the latch cautiously, and then threw the door open with a violent push. It swung back upon him. He thrust it open again and went inside. The room seemed to be empty, but he could see little. He stood still and listened. And at once the tapping started. His eyes came round to the dark heap by the wall where he had left his blankets. He was almost certain that their position had altered, and as he looked more closely he saw that one was hunched upon the floor as if a man was underneath it.

With the energy of terror he ran and kicked it. There was nothing there, only softness. He began to collect himself again. He wished he could lock the door, so as to be safe at least from anything outside. He had seen—he had almost seen—something. A figure in a long cloak, he thought it was, and two eyes, headless eyes. The monk who had lived all his life in this room, perhaps he was outside and wanted to come in. Perhaps it was he who tapped on the wall, seeking admission. Enough of that! He looked up at the window. It seemed higher than he had thought it before, but he must have a try now that he had come all the way back. He tried to whistle, but his breath only came through his lips in a husky whisper.

When he had moved the bench across he found, standing on it, that his hand would still only reach to within about eight inches of the window. With a calm mind he would have doubted the possibility of reaching it, but he did not stop now to wonder. He jumped, missed and fell heavily on to the bench, knocking it over; jumped again, caught the centre bar, hung to it bravely and began to pull him-

self up. He had got his shoulders level with the window when the bar snapped like a dry stick and he fell back with the upper portion in his hands. This time he missed the bench and fell straight to the floor; his right leg and hip sharing the shock. For a moment he lay still, hurt and badly frightened; but in a few seconds the thump of his heart grew less, and when he got to his feet he found that he could stand quite steadily. He was bruised only, nothing was sprained or broken. A sense of exasperation suddenly made him angry and he climbed stiffly on to the bench to make another jump. There was still enough of the bar left to help him again. His knees were bent for the jump when his heart failed him; if he missed, or if the bar broke again, he might be badly hurt, and the slight pain when he moved his hip in one direction was clear enough warning. Miserably he gave it up and sat down.

He would have to sit still now, enduring the darkness and noises, till someone came in the morning and saw the broken bar. That would tell them everything—that he had tried to escape and failed, with the door unlocked for a prisoner of any sense to walk away. He grew less frightened and more angry, till anger stirred his wits into action again, and in time the simple solution dawned upon him. Wondering at his stupidity, he got up and propped the bench on end with its legs against the wall. It did not stand very steadily, but it was strongly made and the upper leg would bear his weight. It was awkward to climb up, with his limbs stiff and his body still shaky; but once he was kneeling on top it only needed caution for him to get on to his feet, placing one at a time, without knocking the bench over, and having gained that position he had the edge of the window to support him. His neck was level now, and it would be easy enough to pull himself up and get through. He stood on tip-toe, bent his head and looked down. There was a good drop, twelve feet or more he calculated, on to the roof below. Impossible.

But he was not to be defeated so easily a second time, and while he was still looking down, subtracting his own length from the distance he had to drop, he thought of the bell rope. It might do, if he could break a piece off. He climbed down and groped his way round the wall till he found it. It was old but fairly thick, nearly half an inch by the feel of it. It would not be easy to break off.

He knew that he had seen a knife quite recently, an ivory pen-knife with rusty metal hinges. Where? Then he remembered, it was one of the tools that Brother Lucius had sent in his little parcel. It must be on the floor somewhere. After groping for some time he came upon it, and testing the blade was surprised to find it fairly keen. He put the handle in his mouth, moved the bench over to

where the rope hung, and again mounted it. He would need all the length he could get—some would have to go to the tying—and balanced precariously with his shoulders against the wall he stretched his arms well above his head to cut. The work was slow and awkward since a single tug on the rope would have rung the bell and that might give the alarm. Holding it with one hand he sawed industriously, with frequent pauses for rest, and at last it dropped. He shut the knife and put it in his trouser pocket, climbed down, picked up the rope and coiled it round his neck. Two minutes later he had mounted to the window, tied the rope round the remaining stump of the centre bar, and thrown the loose end outside.

The stump seemed fairly firm, it would probably hold all right. But the tying, a rolling hitch for safety, had taken up more of the rope than he had expected and the end seemed to hang far above the roof. The whole distance must be greater than he had guessed. And the rope might well be rotten. It felt like an old piece which had been called into service after lying for months in a field, good enough to ring a bell but a doubtful supporter of Klaus's eleven stone. For a full minute he stared down.

The delay was long enough to increase his apprehensions, and again the cold air and the sight of the open sky had brought him nearer to normal feeling. There was no question now of the feasibility of escape, no sense of frustration to drive him towards it. There were the two courses, to go or to stay, and he was free to choose. The peril of escape was great enough to make him hesitate, and he would give himself five minutes for a proper survey of the whole position. Once more he got down, and leaving the bench erect he sat on the floor.

Two hours, three perhaps, before daylight came, so he could spare at least ten minutes. It was comfortable, despite the increasing cold, to sit down after so much haste and struggle. His body deserved some respite, and he was almost glad of the darkness to rest his eyes. The tapping still went on; he heard it again directly he sat still; but he had grown used to it and it came no nearer. Everything grew less frightening when you were used to it, and there was the window leading to the outer world a few feet away. The monk's spirit might be restless, but the noise he had made had been enough to scare it into its remotest haunts. He was quite sleepy again now, almost too sleepy to remember why he wanted to escape. His head fell forward and his eyes closed.

Over in the forest the topmost leaves stirred a little, as if impatient for the daylight. The breeze travelled high, passed clear across the

deep valley and left the lower air almost unconscious of the stir; but it swept low over the Abbot's garden, and met resistance from the Abbey walls. Piqued by the rebuff, it found its way into the quadrangle through every gap in the buildings. It had grown a little bolder in its journey, and it ran round mischievously, lifted a few scraps of paper and drove them into the cloister, rattled the loose windows, found a door half-latched and opened it, murmured softly and went on its way.

The door opened to its full extent, hovered for a moment and shut again with a bang. A puff of wind that had slipped inside went whispering up the steps till it lost its way in the spiral.

Klaus heard the click when the door opened, and woke when it banged. His senses, in full play a few minutes before, were instantly alert, and he knew the noise that had awoken him. Someone was coming up. He listened intently and heard the last sigh as the little breeze, trapped and exhausted, faded away. There were no footsteps.

There was no more sound, only the tapping that went on and stopped and went on again. It might be that someone was creeping up on tiptoe, suddenly to throw open the door and see if he was trying to escape. He wanted to move, but something held him still. Whoever it was must be halfway up now. He made an effort and got to his feet, crossed over to the door and listened again. A moment more and there was a sound, a t-t as if someone had clicked his tongue; but it came from behind, inside the room. He turned his head sharply; there might be something there but he couldn't see; he thought something was moving but he only felt it; saw nothing, heard nothing. If anything had come it must have passed right through him. There might be more than one—they seemed to be all round him. He felt faint, and was conscious, even as he stood with all his senses keyed to catch the slightest sound or motion, that he wanted food. He wasn't strong enough to meet them, the things he feared. He made a new effort, shaking off his faintness, and pulled open the door. Then he knew that something was coming up the stairs.

With a force that shook the walls he slammed the door and ran back to the other side of the room. Something lay on the floor and he trod on it. He stood with his back against the wall, his arms limp, waiting for the door to open. Inside the room something was happening; a light breath moved, and as it wandered in the darkness it shook little pieces of dust from the walls; the tumbler lying on the floor rolled an inch and touched Klaus's foot; a piece of paper with prayers and meditations scraped against the floor as it shifted a little way towards the wall; but Klaus's eyes were fixed on the door. He

heard no sound of the latch being raised, but he was certain that it was slowly opening. He was held against the wall by strong hands, hands that seemed to grip him from within, for he could not feel the hard fingers on his flesh; they had him by the heart and by the brain, and a fist stuck in his throat, tightened so that the expanding knuckles choked him. The door must be wide open now, and he was gazing through the opening at the person outside. He didn't come in—why not?

Klaus tightened his muscles, managed to shake himself a little, and the grip on him loosened. By moving toes and heels alternately he began to work his way round the wall towards the window. The person at the door watched him without moving; he could feel the eyes on him, like a cat's eyes on a captured mouse. But there was just a chance. He was within a foot of the bench, and he prayed as Samson prayed for his strength to return to him. He felt the power releasing its hold, and at last he was free, waiting for the will to jump. He jumped, hands, then knees, then feet on to the leg of the bench. It swayed, but it did not topple over. He thrust both arms through the window and held to the wall tightly.

For half a minute he could do nothing more. In the mad scramble he had twisted a leg sharply, bringing back the pain that had lain dormant since his fall, and he was unable to move for the agony. His face was against the open air, but the terror of the dark room was still heavy upon him. He moved the bad leg carefully and in a new position its pain dwindled till he thought he could climb. But he still hesitated. He dared not turn to look behind him, but in front the distance down to the roof had become more formidable, and the rope hanging beneath his chin seemed still less trustworthy. A few seconds more and his leg would be all right again. But before two had gone he felt light fingers closing upon his ankle.

He kicked back, tugged and squirmed, forced his body to the waist outside the window. From behind came a crack like thunder, as it all the forces that had moved whispering round the dark room joined together to shatter the silence with the explosion of their anger. He reached and caught the rope low down, swung it out, dragged his legs clear, dropped them, and hung swinging, the wall ripping the skin from his knees and knuckles. Then down, hand over hand, with his eyes fixed on the wall, four feet, until the rope broke and he crashed three feet on to the tiles and rolled into the wide stone gutter.

He lay on his back there, not badly hurt and fully conscious. He kept his eyes away from the window. They could no longer hurt

him, now that he had space all round and the open sky to protect him; but he did not want to see an angry, leering face hissing at him from the prison. Complete silence had returned, and there were no signs of anyone stirring.

He turned over and crawled on hands and knees along the gutter. At the end there was a drop of forty feet to the ground outside the Abbey precincts; on the left the wall, the top of it still nearly thirty feet below him, too far to drop even if he could make sure of a landing. He would have liked to rest again, but they might be after him now, Brother Laud and the novices and the whole pack of them. They must surely have heard something, and already they would be half-way up the stairs to the Penitence Chamber. On the ground he knew the geography well enough, but the roofs were new and uncharted territory. He could explore only in one direction; and without a plan, hoping for the best, he crawled up the slippery tiles to the centre ridge and down the other side. Fortune came half-way to meet him. A long roof sloped gently down and almost met the chapel wall, not more than six feet below the gutter. Only an iron gutter bordered it, but that would suffice. Klaus's body was not ready for another jump, but he was wiser than to hesitate. He stood up, leapt, and landed perfectly, the weight of his body on the tiles, the side of one foot caught against the gutter's edge. A few tiles were broken, but he had made less noise than he expected. He climbed at once to the summit, and on the other side worked carefully down again. Then his escape was cut off; a deep drop, without a ledge or a pipe to help him. He would have to go back to the other end.

The only way of proceeding along the length of the roof was to crawl astride the centre ridge, and to this he reascended. When he had painfully travelled six yards along the top he remembered that he had not yet surveyed the outer wall; it was unlikely to offer any help; but it seemed a pity not to inspect it, when the other end might be equally defended and would lead him, even if descent were possible, to somewhere far within the walls. He turned round and went back. At the end, when he lay full length and peeped over, he was sorry that he had given himself the extra trouble, for the wall fell sheer to the ground. A cloud had come in front of the moon and he could see only faintly, but he was satisfied that there was nothing projecting far enough to be of any use. He was about to turn again when the moon reappeared, and he took one more look. Then he saw, quite plainly, a small window only four feet below. It was big enough for a man to get through, little more than a foot in width but two feet or more deep, and when he leant out further he saw that it had no inner frame or glass; there was, as far as he could see, a

piece of cloth hung inside. Beyond that a chest might be standing to block the way, or a pile of boxes—anything that would be stored in an attic; but probably not, or the curtain would have no use.

Klaus shut his eyes and tried to forget the naked distance between himself and the ground. He kept them shut tightly while he felt the edge of the roof with his hands. The centre beam on which he was lying projected beyond the surface of the wall, only a little way, at the most nine inches. He could have measured it better with his eyes, but another glance in that direction would be enough to shatter the remnants of his courage. Nine inches. Well, if it were only six inches that would be just sufficient. He still had strength enough to cling to it.

He turned round and lay with his face in the other direction, then pushed back until his feet were hanging over. If he couldn't manage the window he might still be able to pull up again, and if not they would find him with his neck broken; that would show them what he would do to avoid surrendering. He pushed back slowly, his legs sticking out straight into emptiness, until his stomach rested on the end of the beam. His legs bent down, and he supported himself on his elbows. It was win or fail now. He clasped his hands, gave one more push, and dangled from the beam. His toes, swinging inwards, met the hard wall.

For an instant he thought he had misjudged. The window must have been farther down than it had appeared. In that instant he lost all sense except the urgency of getting back to the roof. He tugged, feeling his arms giving way, and knew that he had not the strength to pull up his body. But he still held on, faintly hopeful that all consciousness would leave him before he fell. His knees, as he tugged again, bent upwards and suddenly his toes shot forward into emptiness.

Clear sense returned as it had vanished. He felt the wall now against the back of his ankles, and as he slowly allowed his arms to stretch it reached his hamstrings. He felt the sharp edge travel up his thighs until his buttocks were supported. Then he kicked back, let go the beam, clapped his hands upwards against the inside wall as his shoulders fell back, and dropped inside the window.

A voice said: "What's that?"

Klaus kept quite still. It was unlucky that the room was not empty, but it did not much matter. He was caught, but the difference between freedom and captivity was the difference of one word from another to a boy who had just hung forty feet above the ground and who now felt the hard floor beneath him. He would have answered, but his brain was limp and the threads which guided his tongue slack and lifeless. He was hardly conscious of any pain, though his knuckles

were stinging and an aching stiffness bit his body from shoulder to ankle. The adventure was over; the fears which had attacked him and been brusquely repulsed at each stage since he had fallen on the Chapel roof were now mounting upon his memory into a precipice of horror, making his whole body tremble; but the memory was that of a dream from which he had just awoken, and to be awake again filled him with bliss so full and overwhelming that neither the haunting of the past nor dread of the future could disturb the first moments of tranquillity. Already he felt within him, closer to his heart than animal quivering, the hard core of a larger courage, the sensation of maturity that came from great experience and a little bravery. He breathed, fast and deeply, but he did not move.

The question was not repeated, and he could almost believe that the voice had come from his own imagination. But as he listened a new noise began, a faint, whistling snore. It sounded more like an animal noise than anything human, the noise that an old dog makes asleep on the hearthrug; yet the words had been quite distinct, and he knew besides that there were no animals of any kind within the Abbey walls. The curtain had fallen back across the window, and though there were small holes in it the room was in almost total darkness. He waited for a few minutes, content to be safe and still, and then crawled forward. His left hand met something wooden and he explored it with his fingers. The wood was rough and there were nails protruding at the edges, telling him at once that it was an old packing-case. He crawled nearer, felt along the top, and touched something made of china; a jar of some sort, with a candle sticking inside it. He stretched out a little farther and found a box of matches.

The fear of close, dark rooms, banished for a time by less subtle fears, began again to creep upon him. With a firm floor to hold his body he was ready to face any danger, but not uncertainty. He wanted to know who was in the room, and his impatience would tolerate no caution. There were only two matches in the box, and in the eagerness of his resolution he broke the first before it had kindled, letting the head roll away beyond recovery. The second he struck cautiously, shielded it till it was well alight, and lit the candle.

When the flame grew to its full brightness he saw a face, so close to his own that he started. It was the pale, dirty face of an elderly man. The eyes were tightly closed, the mouth wide open, and from the nostrils came the little whining snore. But for the snore, and a hardly perceptible twitch of the eyelids as the light pierced through them, it might have been the face of a dead man, bloodless, puffy, flaccid. Klaus recognized the man as one of the cooks, a sour-tempered old fellow who occasionally passed across the quadrangle,

muttering and sniffing, when the pupils were lining up for ambulatory meditation. He was lying on a low truckle-bed with his knees bent up and protruding over the side, one arm stretched upwards across his head, a blanket covering him as far as the shoulders. He seemed to be sleeping soundly, but in time the light might wake him, and with a cautious movement Klaus drew up the blanket to cover his face. Then he made a rapid scrutiny of the room. It was simply furnished; a cupboard on one side, a crucifix in the corner, a home-made table with two or three books of devotion, a chair with the cook's clothes heaped untidily upon the seat. He stood up, crossed the room on tiptoe, and opened the cupboard. The door whined loudly, and the sleeping man grunted. Klaus thought that he must have woken, but he only turned over to face the wall. He tiptoed back, picked up the candle, and carried it to the cupboard. The shelves were crowded with an untidy assortment of trivial belongings, handkerchiefs and stockings, two razors, a greasy wallet wrapped in a piece of serge. On the top shelf he found what he had hoped for, food; a dozen apples, half a loaf of bread, and a piece of cheese.

His excitement cooling, hunger had returned, and the sight of the apples quickened it. He was tempted to eat one of them immediately, but the risk was too great. The cook might re-awake at any moment, and now that he had still a final chance of escape it would be folly to play lightly with it. He had been lucky up to now, lucky beyond all expectation, and though he longed for sleep and rest he could not insult good fortune. The difficulty was to stow away the food; such pockets as he had in his clothes would not take a quarter of it. There was something soft and voluminous on the bottom shelf and he pulled it out. It was an old military coat, ragged and moth-eaten beyond the limits of utility, but it had two side pockets, wide and deep. He felt inside them. They were much patched and there were little gaps between the patches, but they would serve his purpose. He put the coat on. It was a fair fit, too wide in the shoulders and too long in the sleeves but not big enough to embarrass his movements seriously. He put half the apples in one pocket, the rest and the loaf in the other; hesitated, and then took the wallet—it might contain some money and he could return it later. Hunger became too strong for him and he stopped to take one bite out of an apple. The man on the bed stirred and said: "Who's that?"

Two courses were open, to blow out the candle and hope that the man would go to sleep again, or to give some sort of answer. Klaus, from sheer lack of ability to think clearly, rebutted the dilemma by walking out of the room, stealthily but not without noise, and with the candle still in his hand, alight. He closed the door and listened. The

man inside was still awake or half-awake, for the bed creaked and his voice mumbled: "What are you doing? Who's that? Is somebody in the room?" Klaus had sense enough to hold the candle so that its light should not show under the door. The mumbling continued, and he guessed that the cook was searching for the matches. He kept quite still. Presently the small, scratching noises ceased. The bed creaked violently, and then the creaking ceased also. He waited to hear the soft pad of the old man's bare feet on the floor. But there was only silence, and soon the gentle snore began again.

He was standing on a small landing at the top of a stone stairway which folded back and forth in flights of a few steps to the bottom of the building. He tiptoed down, his ears catching snores from the rooms he passed at each stage. One stage from the bottom he paused. He could see, looking over the banisters and holding the candle low, that the last flight faced a narrow passage. Remembering the shape of the building he guessed that the passage would be a long one, leading out at the far end to one of the outer yards. A straight, easy route to Brother Laud and complete surrender. The rooms were all between the stairs and the outer side, and if the bottom room had an outside window it would be barred. The room above, then, at the level where he now stood; that might have a small, high window like the one through which he had entered. Someone would be sleeping there, the Manciple perhaps, or more probably one of the scullions. But except for finding his way round to the outer wall—and he doubted his ability to climb it now—it was the only possible escape.

He wanted to lie down and sleep, to eat the apples, to find someone who would bandage his bleeding hands; anything but more effort and more endurance. Yet the little flame that danger had kindled burnt in him obstinately, keeping alive the smouldering fuel of his determination. In mere distance it was only a dozen yards, or so he thought, confusing escape with freedom; it was a pity to have gone so far and to shirk the last obstacle, formidable as it might be. If he waited another minute drowsiness would conquer him. He took a large bite from an apple, put it back in his pocket, gently opened the door and held up the candle.

The window was there just as he had hoped; a facsimile of the one in the top room; high, six feet perhaps above the floor so that the occupant of the room might not look out upon worldly things; narrow, and covered like the other with a piece of fustian. The room itself was similar, bare and ugly even in the feeble candlelight. For Klaus the worst feature was that the bed stood right under the window, with the sleeper's head directly beneath it. The man appeared to be lying face downwards. His head was completely covered by a blanket, and

his stockinged legs stuck out at the other end. Klaus crept up and bent over him. He was breathing quite silently, the noise smothered by the bedclothes. He might, so still was his body, be awake and listening.

Klaus put down the candle on a chair at the head of the bed, placed one foot on the frame, within a few inches of the sleeper's head, stretched one hand to the wall and carefully raised himself. A sudden tug tore the curtain clean away from the window, and three sharp blows broke away the single pane of glass. He snuffed the candle with a delicate movement of his right foot, then leant forward, grasped the bottom of the window in his arm-pits, and heaved himself up. His feet as they swung towards the wall, struck the head of the sleeping man, who woke with a sharp cry.

"It's all right!" Klaus whispered.

A boy's voice asked fearfully: "Who's that?"

"If you don't go to sleep at once I'll kill you."

The boy plunged his head beneath the clothes. Klaus wriggled and heaved. It took half a minute's struggling, made harder by his stiffness, to get himself sitting in the window with his legs outside. He leant back and said again, clearly: "If you make a noise, if you do anything before morning, I'll come back and kill you."

He turned his head and looked down at the ground outside; fifteen feet away, at least, but it was the last jump he would have to make and fifteen feet was nothing to the hell-deep drop that had gaped below him a few minutes before. Fragments of broken glass were sticking into his flesh. He twisted round and held on to the bottom edge, with the long sleeves giving his arms some protection; lowered himself as far as his arms would allow, swung his legs back a little and let go. A long time seemed to elapse while he was falling, long enough for the thought to seize him—what if this had been the other fall? His knees were bent as his feet came to the ground, and his frame took the shock well. He fell forward against the wall, but his hands were ready for it and he rebounded backwards, finishing in the middle of the road with his back on the ground and his feet in the air. He got up and started to walk, rather dazedly and unable to keep quite straight, along the side of the road.

It was only a rough track, running right round the Abbey walls. He had started without thinking of his direction and it was some time before he considered the matter at all. He had been possessed by the single idea of getting outside the walls, and now his mind was disposed to look back rather than forwards. He was conscious of a vague pleasure in being free; it was a prison, he thought, not only the Penitence Chamber but everything that lay inside. He was not quite

sure why he feared or loathed the Abbey; could not distinguish clearly between the immediate and the remoter consequences of his rebellion; could not even remember the various circumstances which had actually led to his flight. The events of the last hour were unreal, now that he was outside them, and he was even aware of a certain contempt for the perils that had looked so formidable. Clearest in his memory was the Penitence Chamber itself, the patch of moonlight on the wall, theappings, the things that moved unheard in the darkness. And now each portion of the path on which his thoughts wandered was clear, brightly lit, its borders and features plainly marked, but between every portion was a patch of shadow, and he slipped from one to another without realizing that the texture was wholly changed. For a moment he was filled with a desire to stop and eat. But before the wish became action it was supplanted by another, the desire to increase his distance from the Abbey until he was beyond the range of pursuit. A moment later, weariness assaulting him with almost overwhelming power, he was determined to seek for re-admission to the place that was only home and comfort. Yet the fluctuations in his willing made no change in his physical progress, which was governed as if by the mainspring of a clock. He was beneath the end of the Abbot's garden, with the deep valley on his right, before the necessity for making a plan, which had been running as a deep undercurrent below his shifting meditations, uprose into the main channel and forced itself into his attention.

He stopped then, leant back upon the steep bank of soil which supported the garden wall, and tried to face the issue logically. His brain, willing enough to make clear images and defined motions when it went its own way, became inert and useless when his will urged it. He remembered that he had intended to strike across the plain in the direction of the Rotgebirge, and he knew that if he walked a little farther the plain would be before him; but he could not calculate, such was his confusion between time and distance, how long it would take him to walk to the line he thought of as the edge of the world in which the Abbey stood, and he supposed that until he reached so far they would be able to see him. His imagination kept offering ridiculous alternatives, to dig into the ground, to get back inside the walls and hide somewhere there, to stay where he was and hope that the bank behind him would prove sufficient shield against observation. By chance only, or perhaps because a faint whiff was brought by the light wind to his nostrils, he thought of the pine forests on the other side of the valley. The idea was such a good one that he could hardly believe he had overlooked it before. He had never been in that direction; on the rare occasions when walks were made beyond

the limits of the Abbot's garden they had always been along the lane which led past the farm; but the forest was near enough, only a mile or two, he thought. It came right down to the bottom of the valley, and he could reach it simply by going down hill. Once there, he could move under cover until he was beyond possible search.

There was need for hurry; for daylight, he thought, could not be far away; many hours seemed to have passed since he had first woken, and directly it was light someone crossing the quadrangle would see the rope dangling and raise the alarm, even if the kitchen boy was scared enough to keep silence. But the initial effort was hard to make. His body, curved, with the shoulders against the bank and the legs a little forward, had fixed itself in that position as if in a mould, and though its comfort was not complete its weight was so hard poised that it could resist his will. So powerful was this lethargy that, in his drowsy mind, he could imagine that the forest might come to him, sparing him the effort of moving; he could almost see the trees advancing up the side of the valley, one springing up from the ground in front of the other, till the forest would surround and cover and enfold him. A piece of hard soil, dislodged by the disturbance at the bottom of the bank, fell upon his shoulder. The little shock was enough to stir his mind, to pull its contents together until it assumed a hard shape. He felt backwards with one hand, touched the bank, was livened by the contact and gave a little push that sent him stumbling forward across the track to the grass verge. With his eyes on the ground close before his feet, his practical thought concentrated on every next step, he began to go down. Once or twice he slipped. Once, where the bare rock dropped steeply, he fell headlong, but a few rolls brought him to his feet again and he hardly realized what had happened. He did not trouble much about his progress; it was enough to keep going down, and it was fairly easy; just pushing one foot forward and letting it fall, slipping a little, holding to a piece of rock, grasping at a bramble, taking each thing as it came.

He came to a little hollow, and when the ground began to go upwards he thought he must have reached the bottom of the valley. Now he must climb a few yards to get to the first trees. But he would rest before that. He sat down, finding that the movement of his limbs had given him a pleasant warmth, and began to eat one of the apples. He took a large bite, and chewed it slowly, too tired to eat with energy but finding solace in the steady movement of his jaws. His back was towards the forest and he could see the hillside down which he had just clambered, immensely high and bare and steep in the queer light. The Abbey, even the garden wall, was out of sight, but he knew that it would not be far away and was glad to feel its

nearness, with the silent loneliness around him. In the hollow the air lay undisturbed by the breeze passing across the valley, and if a bush or a patch of grass stirred on the hillside it was too far away for him to see. Above, the sky was still clear and the stars showed brightly, reminding him that he should pray. He bent his head forward and prayed: "Jesus!" Then again: "Jesus!" The piece of apple was still sliding from side to side in his mouth, his teeth having ceased to attack it. He spat it out and bit off a fresh piece. The great wideness of the sky gave him a new comfort. Somewhere in that near immensity a point hung directly over the head of his mother. Farther away, but still in the same expanse, much nearer than the stars, there was a point right over Father. For a moment that thought troubled him, for the image of his father was always surrounded with smoke and noise and fire. But with that quiet sky above he would be in safety. He should have prayed for Father, but the words would not come now and he would leave it till the morning.

He said to himself: "I am free, free from everything!" The stars moved, came together and spread apart again, came closer to him, growing brighter and then fading away. The collar of the coat was sticking into his neck and he pushed it back. A deeper curtain, creating itself out of nothing, fell down in front of the sky, and a darker curtain still was drawn across it. The whole of creation turned, slowly and still more slowly, so that he was still and yet rocked in the great cradle; not backwards and forwards, but right, right over. And he was falling, slowly. The soft dark air supporting him but making no resistance.

He was back on the roof again. Either he had not really escaped, had only imagined it, or he had gone back to the Penitence Chamber to fetch something, something important he had forgotten. He had been foolish, he knew, to go back. The man was after him, closer than he had been before, almost touching his heels. The roof was very slippery, and he was in danger of falling into the gutter. To move was easy, requiring no effort of will, no straining of limbs. He had only to keep quite still and something moved him forward, perhaps the fierce breathing of the man pursuing him, but only slowly—nothing he could do would hurry the motion. The man behind had come nearer, was stretching his hand out to grasp his ankle, and there was still a long way to go. He could see only a few feet ahead, and the roof might stretch for mile after mile, and all the time the man was coming closer and every moment he slipped a little towards the

gutter. But he was not afraid of failing to reach the end. He could fight his way there, even with the man on top of him. He was afraid, because he could not remember what came at the end of the roof. He saw the Abbot a few feet away, just visible in the fog, watching him silently. He tried to call out, to ask what came at the end, but no sound came out of his throat. The Abbot was saying something, he could see his mouth moving, but he heard no word, no sound; not even the sound of his own body, moving slowly along the steep slope of the roof. He must surely be near now. The fog rolled in towards him, and the farther he went the less he could see forward. His hands were stretched out, and at last, now that the fog had tightly enveloped him, he felt something, the edge, the edge of the roof. He remembered then what came at the end. Still he moved forward slowly, until his head and shoulders were over. He must look, must see who was following him. With the greater peril to force his courage he turned round and saw that it was only Erich, little, familiar, grinning. "It's only you!" he gasped, and again his breath carried no sound upon it. "Only you!" he tried to say, and Erich was grinning and saying nothing. But Erich was growing larger, his arms were stretching out farther, uncoiling from the side of his body, and there were claws like forks where his hands should have been. His grin widened, his face became malevolent, his teeth, gleaming, grew larger, and his eyes, fierce like fire, became revolving craters. He was rising, towering over Klaus, stooping, no longer human, with his red hot claws curved inwards, ready to pounce upon him. Klaus drew back, right to the edge of the roof, cowered and looked down. There below him was the quivering emptiness, deep, so deep that he could not see the bottom of it, waiting for him with a fearful avidity, springing in its hunger, up and down, with a little twang like the noise of stretched elastic. He would give himself up to Erich. "Take me!" he breathed. "Take me! grasp me! clutch me!" But it was too late. He had lost his balance and the emptiness was going to have him. He was right over now, but he had still got hold of the gutter. It was sliding from his fingers, his fingers were giving way, he could see the infinite distance waiting. And as the gutter was snatched from him he shrieked; a shriek that broke the darkness into halves, making passage for the sun which already was high in the heavens.

In the last struggle he had rolled over, and he was lying on his back at the bottom of the hollow, crying as children cry. For a few moments he went on crying, for to shed tears and to let his chest heave unrestrained was physical outlet for the vertigo of emotion that came to him from the whip-crack of sudden salvation. So abruptly

had the nightmare been snatched away that he could not detach it from his present reality, and he thought that he had fallen right through the darkness into a heaven long forgotten. The stiffness of his legs and thighs, and the bruises which were now so sensible that he seemed to suffer the unceasing flagellation of many padded thongs, made background for this bewildered apprehension. And even when the experience of a few seconds' daylight had driven the preceding moments a little farther down the passage of memory they remained, the outline lost but the colour still heavy upon him, and he could not with determination separate the hours lived from the hours horribly dreamed. He had escaped. That much he knew, but the enemy whose clutches he had at last evaded was a blurred heterogeneity of walls pressing close upon him, of narrow-faced monks and intolerable ordinances, of dark shapes moving between and through locked doors, of infinite distances hanging below his feet. He stirred, and the blood began to tingle in his feet and fingers. A swallow raced across the sky, flying down-wind. Near the top of the hill a sheep stopped munching the close grass to bleat plaintively.

For a time he was content with his safety and his freedom; reluctant to move lest he should find that his legs were broken. But when at last he got up he could stand quite easily. There was a slight insistent pain all over his body, and he felt, besides, as if he were an object that had been thrown into a corner and for a long time forgotten; as if there were cobwebs and mould upon him. His clothes stuck to him greasily, and the dirt he could see thick on his hands seemed to be spread over his brain. Behind his eyes two weights, balanced like the lead which closes the eyes of a doll when it is put to bed, hurt him each time he moved his head jerkily. Yet the pain and discomfort did not trouble him, so serene was he, almost gay, in the bright daylight, with the ground under his feet solid in spite of its softness, and on every side, when he walked to the top of the hollow, space enough to remind him of his liberty. Only an inner weakness, felt in his legs and shown in the swaying of his body when he walked, marred the perfection of his return to wholeness.

It occurred to him then that he was hungry, and he sat down and felt in the pockets of his coat. The apples, the bread and cheese were still there; so that at least had been reality. He began with the bread and cheese, which he ate slowly, tearing off little pieces as he wanted them. The half-loaf did not go very far to meet an appetite that seemed to grow as he tried to appease it, but there were still the apples. He consumed two of them, core, pips, everything but the stalks, but though his hunger was not altogether abated his stomach refused the others. He felt slightly sick, but it would pass, he thought.

He turned to lie with his elbows propping up his shoulders and waited for the food to settle itself.

The sun had risen higher, but he judged that it was still early. Before very long he must move towards the forest. But he could still rest a little longer, give his stomach time to adjust itself, and enjoy uninterrupted the sweet country that filled his eyes and nostrils. He would not go back. That decision he made now with more conviction than he had made it in the dark hours; with more purpose and assurance, for if he could overcome stone walls in the night loneliness, when silence and mystery made every undertaking more fearful, in the gay daylight he could travel far through an unfenced countryside. His reasons were different. He had bolted from humiliation and injustice; chiefly, in the actual performance, from nameless fears. Now, as the fresh air came into his lungs and new strength began to overcome the lingering weariness, the terrors and the humiliation itself became smaller. They were reduced to a part only, though a notable part, of a main discipline that lay behind him like a mountain of oppression. In its very shadow he had hardly realized its enormity, had only resented the chains when he found them barbed to prick him. The new life within and around him made lively his new conception of the accustomed bondage. He felt it growing, a fierceness which would uphold him in his struggle for the liberty that he now desired for its own sake.

Still he was without any but the vaguest plan. The forest was there, and on the other side of the forest there must be something, a town perhaps, or a farm where he could work for a time to earn his journey to Berlin. Berlin; he was vague enough about the direction in which it lay, still more as to the distance. Geography was but sparsely taught at the Abbey; Klaus knew the position of the Americas, and the path of the great tribal movements since the days of the Israelite wanderings; but large scale maps of Germany did not come into the scholastic curriculum—Germany was a territory which lay to the North-East of the Holy City of Rome. Thinking of the railway journey, Klaus judged that it would take him a week, a fortnight, perhaps, to walk the distance. It was only a rough calculation—he would walk farther each day as his legs grew accustomed to the exercise. First he must make sure of the direction; someone would tell him when he got beyond the forest; and then, before he went farther, he must win food enough to take him. Beyond that nebulous design his thoughts would not carry him.

The railway line, on a low embankment, was thirty yards behind him. Till he mounted the side of the hollow and made his brief survey he had forgotten its existence. He remembered now that he

had always seen it, marking the centre of the valley, from the Abbot's garden, and he thought of the stream that ran beside it. The stream was invisible, the embankment cutting it off, but he knew that until it turned to find its gorge in the hillside it was never far from the railway, and to reach the forest he must cross it. It was lucky, he mused, that he had gone no farther in the darkness.

There might be an easy ford, possibly a foot-bridge or at least a tree trunk. He would reconnoitre presently. The wind had risen and it was too cold for him to sit still much longer, even in the heavy coat. But he must rest a few more minutes, just a few more, to enjoy the respite and to feel his new courage growing.

The sheep that had slowly nibbled her way forty yards along the crest of the hill uttered a sharp cry of alarm and bounded clumsily down the slope, till she reached a patch of grass so long and juicy that she forgot her fears as suddenly as they had come. A few of her tribesfolk, grazing at a little distance farther down the hill, raised their heads to see if anything was the matter and galloped a few paces by way of precaution. As far as the sheep could tell the danger had passed, but the warning was enough to stir Klaus from his lethargy. He saw all at once the tactical insecurity of his position, in full view of anyone looking down and with a wall behind him. In a moment he was on his feet, and ignoring the pain that it gave him he ran towards the embankment. Pausing there he looked round, but saw no one. He scrambled up, crossed the lines and turned to look again. From there the garden wall was visible, and just where it bent towards the Abbey he saw the heads and shoulders of two novices walking rapidly along the road.

With a jump he was down the other side, hidden. But unless they had been star- or ground-gazing they must have seen him, a notable target perched on so convenient a pedestal. He was tempted to crawl to the top again and peep over, but decided that it was foolish to waste so much time, and began to run, keeping close under the shelter of the embankment. The stream on his right kept a fairly straight course, sometimes as near as five yards and never more than twenty away. Over to the right he saw what appeared to be a gap through which it escaped, and a glance was enough to tell him that he could not follow it through that narrow, steep-sided opening. There was no sign of a bridge or an easy crossing. In front the hill rose up like a wall, not impossible for a sturdy man to climb, but so bare as to keep a climber in full view till he reached the top. These aspects of the situation came to his attention in quick succession as he ran, but without a fox's or a soldier's eye for what desperate opportunities a position offered he kept on

running, half his mind on the novices who would now be coming down the hill. They ought, despite their skirts and their feebleness, to be somewhere near the bottom now—even they could run fast downwards. He had reached the place where line and stream finally parted, and he stopped. He must ponder for just a second; and if they appeared on the top of the embankment they could watch him swim across the stream. He did not want to wet his clothes. But they would never dream of wetting theirs.

It would be fun to wave to them from the other side, to see their helpless dismay as they watched him retreating. But reason warned him that it might be no good policy to show them the direction of his escape. How far the forest stretched he did not know, but there must be another side, and if the Abbot decided to have the surrounding roads watched he was enough a power in the land to do so. Travelling round the base of the hill and on a hard road the messengers would be on the far side before he was. He could not stay in the forest for ever, and he might find it a prison, wider, but as closely guarded as the Abbey itself. This appreciation of what might lie ahead came to him almost at once with the picture of the frustrated novices watching his retreat, and simultaneously he saw a neater escape.

He glanced round; the pursuers had not yet appeared; and he started to run again, still keeping close to the foot of the embankment. He ran faster now, sweating and panting, and despite the hindrance of the heavy coat he reached the clump of bushes he had seen in less than three minutes. They were sparsely set and almost devoid of leaves, but when he lay down in the middle of the circle there was a good chance of his being invisible. For several seconds he lay quite still, with his face buried in the grass, glad of an opportunity to recover his breath. Then he raised his head cautiously and surveyed the ground he had just covered. There was one of the novices, standing on the top of the embankment a quarter of a mile away, looking in every direction, obviously puzzled. Klaus dropped his head, waited a few seconds, and raised it again. The novice—emblem of all the stupidities, he thought—had begun to walk slowly in the other direction.

So good a chance would not come again, and the novice might turn at any moment. Klaus jumped up, ran stooping to the bottom of the embankment, and crawled up on hands and knees. Just below the top, where the grass was long enough to give him some cover, he stooped and looked down the line. The novice had come to a halt and was looking round; but evidently he saw nothing, for a moment later he turned his head and went on walking, still

the other way. Klaus's objective, the entrance to the tunnel, was just ten yards to the right. He could have crawled a little nearer on his belly, but he decided to take his chance and run for it. He glanced down the line once again—the novice was still walking away from him—and dashed to the tunnel.

He was thirty yards inside before he stopped. There, he judged, he would be well out of view, and with that assurance he looked back. Half a mile or more away the novice plodded slowly along by the side of the track, and even at that distance his gait showed clearly that he had lost interest in the hunt. Poor fool! Klaus thought, and with his back turned resolutely against the circle of daylight he walked on briskly into the darkness.

A few yards farther on the tunnel began to bend, and soon the last streaks of light had disappeared.

It was not easy, in the total darkness, to walk between the sleepers. They fitted his paces, each second step bringing his foot on to a sleeper. But again and again he failed to make his paces even, and he had to feel for the sleeper with his toe. He tried stepping over them all, but decided that this was still more awkward. Frequently he diverged a little from the straight and found his foot against one of the rails. All the time he kept his mind upon the action of walking, knowing that if it were not so occupied it would play tricks with his courage. The track was single. If a train did come—the possibility had not occurred to him when, in a moment, he had decided to use this way of escape—there might not be room for him to stand at the side and let it pass. He might have to lie between the rails, as he had heard of men doing. The air was full of smoke and difficult to breathe. For a moment the thought of suffocation seized him and he was about to turn and go back; but by this time the other end must be the nearer, he supposed, and he went on steadily. "Feet," he said to himself, "think of feet, walking, keeping on walking, hurrying." And there at last was a patch of light, not far ahead.

The light was a disappointment; it was not, as he had hoped, the first sign of the end of the tunnel, but only the bottom of a ventilating chimney. It was some relief, however, and he stopped for a moment in the little murky circle and looked up. There, far away, was the clear sky, and the mere glimpse was enough to give him a little comfort. He looked to right and left. Yes, if he stood with his back against the wall of the tunnel there should be just enough room for him to keep clear of a passing train—he was not sure how far it bulged over the lines. But it was not the train he feared. The rush of a train was only like the sweep of a

boy's fist, swifter, fiercer, more final, to be dodged or suffered. He had no fear of hard, loud-sounding things. It was the tunnel itself, the wall sweeping right over, the ends stopped by a hollow, black nothingness. If he could only think of himself as a being progressing steadily along a tube from one daylit country to another he would be all right. But he was afraid he might forget. The interval was so short, the likeness so great. Only the sleepers and rails—differing little enough from other hard things, a hard bench or a cold, smooth tumbler—were there to remind that he was not back again, shut in, with the door locked and the window high above reach, in the ghostly darkness of the Penitence Chamber. Or back still farther to something that was only a shape, a colour in his dimmest memory, a prison where someone wanted him to die. Wanted him to die. He knew that now. He saw that it was what he had feared back there, back there in the room he must forget now. The tunnel, the room, the prison where someone wanted him to die. And if someone tipped up the tube, so that the emptiness came beneath him——

He had started unconsciously, to go on, and his right foot hit the rail again. The shock, slight as it was, saved him. The rail was there, and the tunnel must be there, only a long tube, horizontal, for trains to go through. The patch of light had disappeared, but the sharp impingement of material things was enough to shake his mind into control of itself. The very thoughts that he had tried to avoid, that he had started to review one by one in order to have them named and positioned, had risen up and tried to take possession. They were still only a little way off, and he had no confidence that he could keep them back until he reached the end of the tunnel, with nothing shaped, no picture, no melody, to occupy the place for which they clamoured. He found that he was sweating, that his breathing was heavy and laboured. He coughed, and the action brought more of the foul air into his lungs. With his hands clenched and the muscles in his legs stiffened, he marched on.

He thought he heard, very faintly, the whistle of an engine, and he started to run, tripping every few paces but making faster progress. He tried running at one side, slapping the tunnel wall to keep himself straight, but the constant bumping of his bruised arm made it too painful, and he returned to the middle of the track. He was almost glad of the whistle—real or imaginary—since it gave his mind a way of escape. He thought now of a train, pictured the engine, pictured the carriages, the people inside, every detail he could remember. So long as he kept some image, however nebulous, it would serve to hold back the dark images that were all ready to

rush in, pressing fiercely, almost bound to find their way inside before he reached the end. How long could the tunnel be? A mile? Two, three, four miles? Miles meant nothing, he could not visualize them in that interminable obscurity. He began to lose all faith, almost to forget that there was a world of green hills with the sun shining; and the ghostly, paralysing thoughts pressed harder. He pictured the train again, forced it, as he sweated, to appear before his closed eyes, until he became one with it and thought that he was an engine, a bulk of inanimate ferocity rushing through a tunnel that had no power to restrain a thing so huge and mighty. On, still running, still thrusting back the invading horrors, still faintly hoping that when he opened his eyes the darkness would have vanished. But he dared not open them, could not face the reality of utter blindness. Until they opened of themselves, a devil of contradiction prompting them, and he saw, no bigger than a two-mark piece, light.

He ran on, unbelieving, but with a faint hope adding pace to his stumbling feet, and the little circle grew larger; as big as an orange, as big as a cartwheel, and then he could see green turf, distinct from the brown of the track, warm in the sunlight. He ran still faster, afraid that the tunnel would narrow and close itself before he reached the daylight. It grew only slowly, and still the green and brown seemed only a picture, neatly framed in the circle, unreal in contrast with the sensible reality of the endless tunnel. He was sure now that he had heard an engine's whistle, and with safety so near the thought made him frantic. His legs were weakening and his wind was almost exhausted. But he ran without flagging, taking a sleeper in every two paces, his will linked with his legs, commanding them without heed to the exhaustion of the power that should have driven them. And the circle broadened, and at last the tunnel was quite clearly lighted, the bricks in the walls showing separately, and then he was out, under the sky again, with the black mouth behind him. He still ran, at the side of the track, his pace slackening but his legs still bearing him forward, defying the agony in his chest; and it was only when the line had curved and he saw, turning, that the tunnel had disappeared, that he dropped face down on the bank.

It was half an hour before he climbed the bank and started to make his way, slowly and dizzily, across the fields.

Emil Lüdemann, Unterregions-direktor zum inländischen Zuführen, was in a hurry to get to Budernitz. Without braking he wrenched his car round the corner, the tyres uttering a strangled

scream, thrust his accelerator down to the farthest limit and drove brutally up the long hill. "You're driving dangerously, Emil," Frieda remonstrated, clutching at the hole in the dashboard, and he replied: "I'm in a hurry. It's past eleven—and there's a war on."

The girl was a nuisance this morning, fanciful, dilatory, provocative. He was beginning to wonder—the doubt had been growing for a fortnight, ever since the Krauthoff affair—whether he was really fond of her. She was a selfish creature, vain and sensuous and greedy, as she herself had more than once admitted; pretty, with a prettiness different from that of the little clerks and stenographers who tumbled over each other in his department; and he wanted badly to go to bed with her, but there were other pretty girls, he reflected, in Munich and elsewhere, who would go to bed with him without half so much formality and expense. The only thing was, if he called off, Rudolf Hempel would have her, without any doubt. Hempel was his junior in age, at least ten years younger, and his senior in office. It would make his position impossible. So he said, putting the gear-lever in neutral and letting the car coast down the hill: "You can trust me, dear. I wouldn't take any real risks, with you in the car." But she would not let him take her hand, and he saw in the driving-mirror that she had not forgiven him.

"I must get just a few primroses," she said presently. "Frau Lauterbach adores them. We've passed ever so many. Do stop if you see any more."

"My darling," he said, quite gently, controlling his exasperation, "I think I've told you that we're late. I promised Thomas that I'd be at the Bohnhaus not later than half-past twelve. You know how important——"

"But you've stopped twice for drinks," she reminded him. "I wasn't thirsty——"

"I didn't realize how late it was then," he said shortly, "and the car's been pulling badly the last twenty miles."

He could only hope and trust that there would be no primroses—it was ridiculously early for them. But before they had gone two miles they saw them, thick in the verge, visible a hundred metres away, too obvious to be ignored.

"Stop, Emil, stop!" Frieda shouted.

With a little grimace—she saw it—Lüdemann gave in and drew the car up, applying the footbrake viciously so that the girl was thrown forward. "Buck up then!" he said.

She had jumped out before the car stopped, and was on her knees, regardless of the damp, pulling up the flowers by handfuls and throwing them over her shoulder into the car. Emil sighed,

glanced at his watch, clicked his tongue, and lit a cigar. He would give her five minutes. He pulled out a pad of indent vouchers from under the squab and began to go through them, checking the items against the pink duplicate slip. Presently he looked to see where Frieda had got to. She was fifty yards along the road, holding a skirtful of flowers and still picking, wholly absorbed, actually singing. "Frieda!" he called, "come on, you must have got enough." But she took no notice. And a moment later he heard her scream.

He started the car and drove on to where she was standing, looking at something in the ditch.

"What is it?" he asked abruptly.

"It's a man," she said, her self-possession recovered. "He's dead."

"Are you dead?" Emil asked, loudly and practically.

He prodded the body with his toe, and it stirred. Then the head lifted and a face, grimy and covered with moss, turned towards them, the eyes blinking. It was a schoolboy.

"Oh, you're alive, are you!" Emil said, "that's all right. This lady thought you were a corpse." He began to walk back towards the car.

"Emil, stop!" Frieda ordered. "We can't leave him here."

"But why not? Since this is where he is, this, presumably, is where he wants to be." But seeing her face grow stubborn Emil turned to the boy. "Where do you belong to?" he asked abruptly.

"The Veronian Abbey." The boy spoke in gasps, as if he were out of breath. "But I don't want to go back there," he panted.

"The what abbey?" Emil had never heard of it. "Well, where do you want to get to?"

"Berlin."

"Berlin! That's a long way. That's practically on the other side of the world. You'd better go back to the what-you-call-it abbey."

"No!" Klaus sobbed. "Not there! I can't—I can't go back there."

"Look here, Frieda, we're wasting time."

Frieda herself was not much interested in the grubby boy—he'd been out for a day's poaching probably, and was afraid of the thrashing that awaited him—but Emil must, once and for all, be taken in hand.

"We must put him in the car," she said, "we can discuss what's to be done with him as we go along."

Emil hesitated, but only for a moment. So long as Frieda wanted to go on it was the best he could hope for.

"All right," he said. "Come on, youngster, jump in!"

It was Frieda who gave the boy a hand to help him out of the ditch, where he had sat till now, showing no inclination to move; and she who supported him to the car, for he swayed badly when he started to walk.

"Put him in the back!" Emil ordered. "Oh! are you going in with him? All right."

He slammed the door by his seat, leaving her to shut hers, engaged gear and drove on.

A piece of chocolate—Frieda was seldom without chocolate—made the boy revive a little, but she could get very little out of him to satisfy her curiosity. He was not hurt, he said—only a few bruises and little cuts, which he had got falling off a roof. Yes, he was out of breath because he had run a long way, and: "I have been pursued by diabolical imaginings." A quaint person, she thought, quite something to talk about. He wanted to get to Berlin, that was the only thing he seemed to have quite clear. Yes, his parents lived there, at least his mother, his father was away at the war. "Poor little man!" she said, conscious that he was not physically little and uncertain why he should be an object of her sympathy, except for the cuts and bruises, which all boys had. But why was he so oddly clothed, she wondered; of course, the abbey, yes, one of these monastic schools she had heard about; but why the soldier's coat on top. It was a fascinating mystery, and would provide at least a week's conversation, ample payment for a kindly act in these days when news was always the same news, when you looked at the map in the paper each morning and could not detect any change in the position of the dotted line; when you saw every day that someone or other had gone whom you remembered as a nice boy, and wondered whether it really made any difference, when they had all been out of sight so long; when you began to think of news as nothing but the history of a world steadily, quite steadily, melting into nothing. "Have you any friends about here?" she asked, and he replied, rather dreamily: "No, no friends."

"We shall be passing Zwickfurt station," Emil said, without turning round. "Shall we drop him there?"

"How would that do you?" Frieda asked.

"A station? Oh yes, that would be quite all right."

"So be it!" Frieda thought. It was a pity to curtail Emil's embarrassment, just as he was coming to the amusing martyr stage, but she was lunching with Anna and the boy would be a nuisance if they didn't get rid of him. He had quite woken up now, and was fit to look after himself. In any case, it was not her business.

They reached the station and Klaus, without any prompting, got out.

"I am full of gratitude," he murmured.

"You'll be all right?" Frieda asked, depending on him to say "Yes."

"Quite all right," he answered gravely.

Emil, remembering suddenly that he had a boy fighting, asked: "Have you got any money?"

Klaus started. "Oh yes!" He took a soiled wallet from an outside pocket and opened it, disclosing three notes. "I should have said—I should have asked you—your petrol."

Frieda grinned.

"Oh nonsense!" Max grunted, suddenly red with embarrassment. "I only meant, had you enough to see you through."

"But where did you get that?" Frieda asked suddenly.

"I stole it."

"Stole it!" Emil barked.

"Yes. Of course I'll send it back."

"Himmel!" Emil slipped in his clutch and the car began to move.

"Stop! One minute!"

He would not have stopped, but to enforce her order she opened the door and jumped out. "Is that all you've got to get you to Berlin?" she asked.

"Yes. I shall walk, and earn as I go."

"Emil," said Frieda, "please give me twenty marks."

"My dear girl," he expostulated, speaking in English, "he's a little thief, he's said so."

"No," Klaus interrupted, "I didn't say I was a thief."

"If you won't give them to me, lend me twenty marks," Frieda persisted.

On the matter of generosity Emil, being not entirely Gentile, was sensitive. It was unfair of Frieda, unlike her. However—"I've only got fifties," he said, controlling his shoulders and picking off one of the notes with a wetted forefinger. "Will that do?"

"Thanks!" Frieda said, and handed it to Klaus, who took it quietly.

"It is a loan," he said. "I am full of gratitude. I must have your address, please."

Emil turned his back. "All right, all right," he muttered, "come on, Frieda!"

Another five minutes gone! he thought bitterly.

"'Lüdemann, Budernitz,' will find him," Frieda called as the car moved away. "Good-bye! Good luck!"

She said something in Emil's ear which made him smile, for the first time since they had left Hochtgen. She smiled back, and then looked over her shoulder. Klaus was still standing where they had left him, and when he saw her turn he waved his hand. The car went round the corner.

The clerk was incredulous when the muddy, tired-looking youth asked him what the fare was to Berlin. "Are you sure you mean Berlin?" he asked. "The capital of Germany," Klaus explained. "What class?" the clerk asked stiffly. Klaus answered: "Fourth."

He had enough money, enough and a little over, thanks to the blessed St. Anthony who was watching over him. He bought the ticket and asked when the next train would be. In two hours, the clerk told him, there would be a train to Zubekfurt, where he would have to wait for the express. How long? The clerk could not say, he was unfamiliar with such remote matters. If Klaus came back in about two hours, say an hour and three-quarters, there would be a train ready to take him to Zubekfurt.

Klaus, however, having put the ticket carefully in his wallet, found a corner of the platform which was sheltered from the wind and lay down. An hour and a half later, when the clerk limped down from his cottage to sell tickets to any who might want them he found him fast asleep.

In Zubekfurt there were five hours to wait. Klaus bought a sausage-roll, found a lavatory where he did his best to clean himself up, and went out into the quiet town. By the station clock it was twenty minutes to four. He crossed the station square and walked slowly up the Domstrasse, stopping half-way to sit down and eat his roll. Without intention he dozed for a quarter of an hour, until the rain, which had started to fall in a light drizzle, blown vexatiously by the wind, woke him. He went on slowly up the street, and came suddenly upon the cathedral, a massive and forbidding structure of grey brick. Inside he found only a few people praying, scattered widely throughout the vastness, women mostly, and a half-paralysed hunchback who rose from his knees to beg alms. A priest moved aloofly across the transept and disappeared through a little door. From the tall, unstained windows the light found every corner. The organ was silent, and the aroma of incense only faint and intermittent. The walls made a shelter against the wind,

but their unvaried pallor reflected the chill of the daylight and the sacred ornaments which alone relieved the mundane austerity were rich and vulgar, the pictures at the stations crude copies of Veronese. Ashamed of his appearance, Klaus knelt a few feet from the door, and remained on his knees for a few minutes, shivering. But he could not pray in this cold, hollow place. Even as the light faded it became only gloomy, receiving no gracious mystery from the shadows. The others had gone now, and except for a verger who clanked keys and brooms together somewhere behind the altar, the cathedral was empty. He stole up the nave, keeping close to the pillars, crossed to the Lady altar, and lit a candle, having slipped a mark into the alms-box. Comforted by that devotion, he went out through the north door, buttoned up the collar of his coat, and choosing a back street at random found his way to the river. The wind had driven a thick quilt of clouds across the disappearing sun, bringing darkness swiftly, and already a few street lamps were lit, the rest left unlighted for economy. Klaus walked to the new bridge and crossed it, hurrying as much as his bruises would allow him to keep himself warm, and then back towards the station on the other side. The river lay black and motionless, the high warehouses deepening the blackness with their shadow on the other side, and only a trickle of light from the lamps near the tow-path reached as far as the water to paint a little pool of dancing brightness on the surface. He reached the old bridge, turned and walked back again. A ragged woman with a pinched face, who had been standing in the shadow of the weighbridge house, stepped out and asked him if he would like to take a walk with her. Scared, he said: "Nein, gnädige Frau," and quickened his pace. He did not know why she had scared him, but he dared not pass that way again, and he went back across the new bridge. He stopped a soldier and asked the time. It was only just after five o'clock. He went down the steps and along the wharves between the river and the warehouses. Reaching the old bridge again he turned and walked towards the centre of the town. A little beer-shop was open, and he went in and ordered bread and cheese with a glass of ale. At a table in the corner he sat as long as he dared, long after he had paid for the food, but when he saw the proprietress looking at him curiously he rose hastily and went out. He walked up one long street and down another. His legs felt very weak again, the street-lamps when he looked at them bulged and quivered, and he found himself colliding with other walkers. It was quite dark now, but a bare half-hour had gone. Only a few shops were open, the streets were empty and lifeless, and the rain was falling steadily. He turned and

started to walk, as he thought, towards the station, to discover after ten minutes' tramping that he was lost. In a straight street forested by an unbroken line of houses on either side there was no one to direct him. He went back the way he had come, walking more slowly, and though he met several men and women he had not the courage to stop them as they hurried to get home before they were soaked to the skin. At last he stopped a woman with a barrow, and she told him, when he had pierced her deafness, that he was going in the right direction, but the station was a long way off. He had only one desire now, to be under shelter, and he forced his legs to hurry, bending his head to meet the rain that now blew sheer against him and only yielded when a side-gust whipped it about his ears and neck. He crossed two side-streets, bore left when the road bent that way, paying little heed to anything but the necessity for walking, till he realized that he was passing buildings which he could not have failed to notice if he had passed them before. The rain still increased in volume, and the wind drove it down the streets and across the squares in blinding sheets. The entrance to a big house offered him shelter, and he sat on the steps to wait for the rain to slacken, but the drips running from his hair down his back made him wretched, and after ten minutes the storm showed no signs of abating. A half-naked urchin came to share the shelter, appeared from nowhere like a larger drop of rain solidified into the semblance of human form, and crouched motionless on the bottom step, his baby head between his knees and the water running from him in a little stream to join the torrent in the gutter. He took no notice when Klaus first spoke to him, but when asked again and again in which direction the station lay, he replied in a vowelless patois that it was behind them, and made his meaning plain by a gesture of his hand. For a moment the downpour seemed to be subdued, and with the house to shield him as far as the corner Klaus started again, running and walking by turns. The child's indication had been correct, and in a quarter of an hour he came, to his surprise, upon the station. In the entrance hall the clock showed that it was twenty to seven. There was no fire in the waiting-room, but it was warm by comparison with the streets and he went in and sat down. The waiting-room clock said a quarter to seven, and he watched the big hand move through another five minutes. That period had to be repeated twenty-five times before he could get away from Zubeckfurt. The clamminess of his clothes made it impossible to sit longer, and he paced the waiting-room till the annoyance of other passengers became vocal, then continued to pace up and down in the hall outside. There, though the rain found

no admittance, the wind romped elfishly, divided by the pillars and doorways and draughts that surged up towards the open platforms and gavotted about the offices and bookstalls, swept down the passages and puffed coldly into the luggage-room. He endured it for a few minutes, stamping his tired feet and slapping his chest; then back to the waiting-room, where only two old women still sat huddled in a corner and where the clock said five past seven. With so little opposition he could again keep moving, and he strode the whole length of the room, and back, and back again, till his legs rebelled and he was forced to sit down. He felt a little drier, and after a few more turns, alternated with rests on the leather seats, he found that a good part of the damp had either evaporated or soaked into his body. His circulation was returning, but still, with the little knowledge he had of the effects of damp, he dared not keep still except for short periods, and for another half hour he kept walking and sitting down by turns. With his eyes half-closed he sat, then, looking at the dirty floor, constantly raising his eyes to see the clock, trying to wait ten minutes till he glanced again and finding, to reward his resolution, that only five minutes had gone. At half-past eight he went up to the platform, showed his ticket and passed the barrier. The platform was still more deserted than the hall below and there was nothing to give him shelter. Only a few lamps burned, and beyond the edge of the platform he could see nothing but the rain as it streaked through the patches of light. He paced the whole length, and back again, and saw that four minutes had gone. One more passenger appeared, and when the hand had passed the figure eight, passengers came in a little stream till there were fifty or sixty. They stood in groups, sheltering each other. The train did not arrive till after nine, and it had only one fourth-class coach which was already full. Nearly half the passengers from Zubekfurt were travelling fourth-class. Klaus found a place on the floor, wedged between a market-basket and a hamper of pigeons. The windows were closed to keep out the rain, and inside the air was rank with tobacco. In ten minutes the train started. In time, by nudging the hamper away to give himself more space and by re-arranging his legs, Klaus found a position of greater comfort. But every join in the rails sent a shock through his spine, and throughout the night, though he dreamed deliriously to the tune and form of his surroundings, he was sleepless.

Towards daylight the rain slackened in Berlin. It had come from the Atlantic, moving north-east; had dripped its first over-

flowing on Le Mans and Tours, had soaked Paris, had driven over the line from Verdun to Dunquerque, had drenched tired soldiers and sent the clay running in streaks of liquid mud down the sides of the trenches to make a jelly that squelched and chortled beneath the duckboards; still moving north-east it had gathered its forces to pour down upon Germany, and all night, cloud following cloud in unbroken succession, it had beaten against the windows of the train that ran northwards from Zubekfurt to Stettin. But when dawn came it was nearly exhausted. It had still a few cloudloads left to sprinkle over Danzig, but upon Berlin its wrath was satisfied, and as the sun rose, the wind, last relic of the storm, blew the final drops against the houses of Schönberg, leaving the roads and pavements shining.

Upon these wet streets the sun began to shine, though timidly, and to townsmen the cool freshness of damp evaporating seemed to be the smell of Spring. There was in the air a faint courage, a promise of new things. The younger of those men, maimed men for the most part, who moved anxiously and importantly up and down the Wilhelmstrasse, were whispering to the girl friends with whom they snatched half an hour in the cafés that things were hopeful. If it could be kept up now—they had only got to hold the position for a few days, for a few weeks perhaps—they were going to launch a blow that would finish up the business. Once the enemy cracked the drive on Paris would be nothing but a triumphal progress—if Paris were the objective, but about times and places they could say nothing, not even to Hilda and Louise. And by summer the war would be over. That much, with transparent insincerity, they promised. The Fraus and Fräuleins accepted and passed on these assurances, which had reached them day by day for weeks and months past, but were coming thicker now, and they re-lit a cigarette that had already been half smoked before the coffee came, or smiled with that grave, superficial smile that had become the habitual greeting to such hopeful promises, a token to pay for a token. Yet the older men, who had cars to take them from the station to the Ministry, enormous in their uniforms, taciturn, their eyes half-hidden beneath brows that fell upon them with the sheer weight of sleeplessness, were ready to smile occasionally when their wives dared to ask them, once in a week if there were five minutes for a cigar between dinner and duty, how things were going. "Not so well," they said, "but presently——" And the word was going through the exhausted city, too worn to believe or to care very much but still with a lingering appetite for optimism: Presently! So, when the sun rose to find the sky free for it, Berliners threw up their blinds

and smiled faintly. "It has stopped raining," they shouted to each other.

In that awakening mood Klaus found Berlin, and as he walked from the station the faint optimism, that was partly in the waves of subtle feeling stretching from mind to mind and partly in the smell of the rain-washed pavements, caught his passive spirit and gave it its direction. To be out of the train, free to stretch his legs and breathe clean air, was enough to awake the resilience of a mind in a young body. He was tired, more tired than he had been when he had woken the previous morning in the deep valley. But with all danger behind, the Abbey almost lost, and forgotten familiarities crowding into his sight, he had still more to refresh him than the feel of soft, supporting ground and the warm sunlight. He had come far since then, and the tunnel was left behind, the tunnel that still confused itself with the Penitence Chamber, and the cold, monotonous streets of Zubekfurt, and the agonizing journey. It seemed that he could feel still the shocks and shaking, as surely as he still felt the grazes and bruises, while the stiffness of his whole body had seized his brain as well, so that all power but that of walking and following the well-known route was taken from him. Yet he could detach himself from brain as from body and allow his spirit to open towards the pale sun. A feeling almost of gaiety invaded him with his return to a lost and familiar world; it was the sensation of a dream, but a dream reversed; with a dull pain transient, surrounding his body instead of the permanent comfort of bed-clothes and mattress, and in visual images a reality made sure by sequence, yet varnished with the colours of illusion. Almost he found a pleasure in his weariness, so intimately it reminded him of what he had passed for ever. Only the tunnel, with the macabre imagining that the memory of it still stirred in him, made a cloud against the bright horizon of his liberty; for that had cut a scar on his brain which he could even now feel faintly, and would hurt again in a bad season.

The streets were not empty, but the *bourgeois monde* was still in bed and the world still belonged to the plinth-stones of its social fabric, to those who, in war as in peace, must rise to make a town ready for its people. The rain had washed the steps, but conscientious servants, pale women with straggling wisps of hair sticking out from their dust caps, must scrub them again before the neighbours were about. A milkman clanked his cans from one house to another, the vans rumbled noisily along the side-streets, and when Klaus reached the Detzgerstrasse the postwoman was delivering the newspapers. He saw a woman waiting for her copy, standing just inside the doorway in her dressing-gown. When she received it

she opened it at the middle and ran her eye down the columns. He saw her drop the paper suddenly and walk out into the street. She crossed the roadway two yards in front of a military car; it swerved to avoid her, its brakes screeching, but she seemed not to notice. She walked straight on along the pavement, overtaking Klaus, with her eyes fixed on something far ahead. He thought that her spirit was fellow to his own, detached, neither ordering nor governed by her body. Perhaps she, like himself, had not slept that night. Or perhaps in this early hour those who first found the world knew a special liberty, unknown to those who came upon a morning that was clean and trimmed and breakfast-bearing. Only, she had not smiled, and he knew that he was faintly smiling. He turned into Hohenzollernstrasse and crossed the Fehrbellinerplatz.

He found himself hurrying now. Every breath in the sweet air revived him, and as he came nearer home his elation increased. He could not have explained that elation, for it was compound of the sense of freedom, the pleasure of familiar things, a boy's delight in successful truancy, and the rich sense of a storm vanquished; beyond that was a hope that he tried to press back in his mind, frightened to utter it; the faint, obstinately pursuing hope that his father would be home again.

In her rare letters his mother had said little of Father; often she did not mention his name. And Father himself had not written for a long time—he was too busy, Klaus thought, leading the Kaiser's troops against the French. But he might have got a holiday now, perhaps he had arrived yesterday, or would arrive to-day. Mother might not have known, or had forgotten to tell him. Her reticence neither hurt nor puzzled him, for she was a being too fine, too ethereal, to put herself into letters; they were only an outline drawing, not a picture of her; and his relations with her were so different, so distinct and apart, from his intimacy with Father; that long-unnourished intimacy which, in his memory, had lost its shape but assumed a still brighter, warmer, more sacred colour. For him he had a boy's strong friendship; for her a tenderness which seemed to find, or thought or hoped it found, her inmost being, but would not suffer the bold shape of hands clasped and words adoringly spoken. He had wept sometimes, as a child, with the bitter fear that he had not given her enough; but in puberty the relationships he had always known became fixed in the growing stability of his reason, and he questioned them no more than he questioned his own abilities, the strength of his body, his ease in languages, his love for pictures. A sense of mystery remained, but it was one with the eternal mysteries of creation, of birth, sensation and knowledge.

If only Father were there! That would make his homecoming perfect; would create the atmosphere of understanding, help him in the difficult task—only now had it occurred to him—of explaining. If only . . .

He had reached Hummelstrasse and he could see the house. He would have run had his stiffness allowed him. After all those hours, the hours at Zwickfurt station, the hours at Zubekfurt, the long hours in the train, he was within twenty seconds of his destination; and in spite of the brown smoke puffing inside his head he knew that it was not a dream. The door was open, and as he reached it the familiar smell, a smell quite different from that of any other house, floated out to him. No one was in the hall. He crossed to the drawing-room door and softly opened it.

His mother was there, standing near the garden window, stooping to arrange a vase of daffodils on a low table. He saw her face in profile, and her eyes were on the flowers. She had changed, and for a moment he was not certain that it was she. But he recognized her dress, dark brown, old-fashioned, the sleeves very wide and caught close at the wrists.

He made a step forward and she looked up and cried: "Karl!"

He stopped dead.

"It's me, Klaus!" he said.

She turned away from him and looked out of the window. She had a flower in her hand, and she began to pull off the petals, dropping them on to the floor; the last she caught and rolled between her fingers. He had crossed the room and stood close to her, but she did not look at him, and with a step backwards she sat down on a little chair, her eyes still fastened on the petal, her lips close.

"I've come back, Mother," he said.

He pulled up another chair and sat opposite to her, silent, waiting for her to speak. He was tired and empty now. The prison from which he had escaped into the sunlight had closed round him again, defeated him, and the sun had gone out. The windows in the room were shut, and the smell of the flowers, which had poured out into the air all night, overcame him with a nausea of sweetness. His body lay heaped in the clinging, heavy clothes, and all the pains and discomfort in it flooded his consciousness. He could not make the effort to rise and open a window.

He said at last, hearing his voice as if it came from a great distance: "Is Father back?"

She answered sharply: "No," and repeated, tapping a finger on her knee: "No, no."

He was watching her face, and he noticed how her lips were

moving, the end of her tongue poking and sweeping as if she were vexed about a petty domestic mishap; but he did not see the tiny, unnatural movements of her chin. He waited patiently, and she spoke at last, almost inaudibly, as if she dared not open her mouth.

"Why have you come back? You were safe there."

"They were unkind to me," he said.

"You were safe there," she repeated.

He could no longer think why he had come back. There were several reasons, Erich, and Brother Laud, and the tunnel, but not one single reason, and all the facts were dancing a slow circle in his head, steeped in the clogging odour of the daffodils. He saw that her eyes were on his face and that she wanted another answer.

He could only mutter: "They said that I was an Englishman."

It meant nothing when he said it like that. Without the Abbey, without the cold, and Erich's face, and Erich's thin, repeating voice, a taunt meant nothing at all. He realized how foolish and contemptible the explanation was, and he wished he had thought of something else, invented a reason. But he heard his mother say huskily, throwing the words against her teeth: "It's a lie. It's a lie. You're not English. The English are cowards. They——" Her voice sank so that he could not hear it, and he only caught, "—your—Heinrich."

He was speaking against himself, saying anything so that he should not hear her speaking in that strange, gritty voice. "He kept on. I hit him. It was unchristian but I could not—they locked me up. It was dark. I had to get away——"

But she was not listening. She only repeated: "It's a lie, you're not English."

Presently she rose and said: "I must go now. There's a lot of work to do. I've been wasting my time doing the flowers—they were all drooping over and they wanted fresh water. I haven't made my bed yet."

She went out of the room, and when he had collected his strength he followed her. He took off the heavy coat in the hall and hung it on one of the pegs. The kitchen door was open, and seeing that no one was there he went in, put a bowl in the sink and filled it with water. He washed face and hands, drew a scrubbing-brush that was handy across his hair, and looked at himself in the little mirror that hung on the outer door. His face, haggard and dark-eyed, almost beyond his own recognition, was still filthy, but the cold water had made him feel fresher. He dried it on a dishcloth and went upstairs.

In her bedroom his mother stood idle, fingering the *Decke* which

lay on a chair. He took hold of the pillows and heaped them on another chair, pulled the undersheet straight, beat the pillows, shook and replaced them. As she watched him she unbuttoned the *Decke* and began to pull out the quilts. He went round to her side of the bed, caught hold of the quilts, and tugged them, while she held the white cover. "There's a clean one in the cupboard," she said. He knew the cupboard she meant, on the landing, and he fetched a clean cover. Together they pushed in the quilts, fastened the buttons, laid it on the bed, and spread the counterpane.

Hedwig stood near the head of the bed, fiddling with the pillows. Klaus, standing a little way behind her, thought that she was crying, though she uttered no sound. Suddenly she sat down on the edge of the bed. He sat down beside her, quite close; turned his body, put his right arm on her left shoulder, and let his head fall against her breast.

For a moment her arms hung still at her side, her long fingers rubbing the quilt. Then, slowly, she lifted her arms to surround him, held him closer, hugged him tightly. When he felt her arms tightening he pushed his body against hers fiercely, so that she lay right back across the bed. His arms had come round her, his cheek was against hers, and their embrace grew tighter.

She whispered: "Liebster, Allerliebster, Du gehörst mir, nur mir."

An omnibus hooted as it passed the house on its way to the gas-works.

VIII

It stood in a back street, not far from the fashionable quarter. It was still called a club, retaining the title from the days when young officers had found its atmosphere freer than that of the mess and credit just as easy: exclusive then—no entrance fee, but strangers found themselves unwelcome and departed; the Russian who had come into the property, God knew how, picked a living from anyone who had the price of a glass, but occasionally an old member came in and drank sentimentally.

There was only one patron this evening, a grey-haired man of twenty-five; a few tradesmen had been in for a round, about seven o'clock, but had not stayed. It was nearly eleven now, and the young man sat staring in front of him holding an empty glass. He was joined presently by another, wholly bald, fleshy and drooping in the stomach, who was still in military clothes and who sat down, without speaking, a little behind him. The first man slowly turned his head, gazed at the other, uncertain, for a few seconds, and then held out his hand.

The bald man looked up and said: "Fritz!"

"Martin!"

Rather emotionally they sat holding hands, smiling at each other with fixed grim smiles.

"Well," Martin said at last, "we're alive. Both of us."

"Yes. Still alive."

They called for the proprietor who had been dozing over a newspaper in the service-room.

"I'm afraid I've no money," Fritz said. "At least"—he fumbled in his pocket and brought out two small coins—"I doubt if these——"

The proprietor, Lopahin, stood at the door, dishevelled, his insolent face for a moment obsequious.

"Is this worth anything?" Fritz asked.

He held out a little figure of the Virgin, smaller than his thumb, but of ivory and exquisitely cut.

Lopahin took it and eyed it scornfully.

"No," he said, "there's no one to buy these things."

"But soon——?"

"Soon! Ah, who knows? Soon we'll be all dead."

"And then what good'll your cellar be, eh? Go on, get something."

Lopahin said grudgingly: "Well, a Munich? Yes, I have two or three bottles. One for each of you. I'm only being kind——"

"Get it," Martin ordered. When Lopahin had gone he said: "Worth seventy marks, pre-war—not less. I know about that kind of thing."

"Pre-war?" Fritz drummed his forehead with a middle finger. "Oh yes, I seem to remember. Where did you get it?"

"I found it—as we say. In Birnewald, in an old bourgeois house. There was a lot of truck lying about, but that was the only portable thing worth anything. That fellow knows all right. It's worth enough to get drunk on. Do you know Birnewald?"

"No. Yes, yes, I spent a day there once. With a student excursion. One of the rowdy places now, they tell me?"

"Yes. Rowdy."

"You've got a job there?"

"Yes, a job of sorts. They don't pay me, but there are rations—now and then, when they're not stolen."

"What do you do? Ceremonial drill?"

"That's it. That sort of thing. I'm in charge of a very smart battalion. We're inspected by brass-hats nearly every day."

"Ah, so?"

"And between times we keep order among the civil population."

"Hard work?"

"Not very. The civilians are mostly women, you know. They scratch, of course, and some of them run like blazes. But they take their daily meals off things that aren't good for them, wood and stuff, and they fall down after a bit. Then it's quite easy to shoot them. I'm not sure that I wouldn't rather be shooting the English. It's an act of mercy but—I'm not really used to it yet."

"You can't grumble," said Fritz. "I haven't had a job—nothing that you'd call a job. I thought of going to England and trying for a job as servant in a rich house."

"That's an idea. They'd like to have a 'Hun' crawling about the kitchen."

"But unfortunately they've got an unemployment problem, so they tell me. We killed a few, I seem to remember, but they don't know what to do with the ones we missed. It's hard for them, eh?"

"It makes the heart bleed."

Lopahin brought the drinks and went away. The two men mechanically toasted each other, and for a while sipped in silence.

"I don't know what it is," Martin said at last, tapping his glass with his finger-nail, twisting his mouth, shy of his approach to seriousness, "but Birnewald—gets me in rather a queer way."

Fritz nodded over his glass and made a sympathetic noise with his tongue.

"I didn't think I was—you know—nervy. I didn't use to be. But Birnewald"—he shivered—"cobwebby. I have to take a stroll in the evenings—I can't stay in, with all the queer noises and things—and then I walk up and down the streets, and they seem to be deserted and you're not quite sure if they are, and there's a queer smell everywhere, something rotting, I don't know what, and everything seems to be tapering off into—what's the word I want?—something like 'annihilation,' only annihilation with a special colour and smell. Look here, I'm talking nonsense, I'm sorry. You remember when that one burst just underneath me, at Cal Dépaux? It left me a bit—I've always been rather—since then. . . ."

"No, go on. I think I see what you mean. I met another fellow from there. He said it was bad. He told me it was worse in some ways than what he'd been doing."

"But it's not that I'm afraid of someone jumping out from a side street. Not that I would mind being murdered. At least, not very much. A fellow did throw a bayonet at me one night, from a top window. It was a good shot, it got me right between the shoulder-blades, but it was too blunt to go in. Hardly tore my jacket. But I don't mind that sort of thing, and I'm getting used to the noises. It's the feeling that the place lies outside time. That's the best way I can describe it. Nobody there talks about the past, not even the recent past, and as for the future—they don't believe that the word means anything. But on top of that, they don't really believe in the present. You have the idea that everyone exists mechanically, like automaton, controlled by a stupid providence like an infant fumbling with a puppet apparatus. Even when they're angry and excited. You can stand in front of a child, and it shakes its fists at you and uses horrible language, but if you look deep into its eyes you see that there's a child's soul there, alive but motionless, hardly sentient, not born yet or else born and a long while dead. That's what I have about me all day. And at night the souls are all round you, drifting about, until you're not sure if you're the same yourself, not sure if you're more a stranger to them or to your own being. And the streets are so long, with no lights.

Sometimes I want to run and run to get away from the place, right out into the open country, and then I feel that there is no open country, only the street going on and on, with the dark houses and the invisible faces peering, and the smell—oh Christ! that smell! it's in my nostrils now. And I've got to go back to-morrow——”

Fritz poured the rest of the beer down his throat and sponged his lips with his tongue.

“Back—why?”

It was a question Martin could hardly answer.

“Well,” he said confusedly, “—duty——”

“Duty?” Fritz suddenly blazed. “Duty, my God! Do you believe in duty?”

“Believe? Well, no. But it's a habit.”

“A habit, yes, a habit to be cured. Duty! Why, haven't we done enough duty? And the others, didn't they do enough for all time? The whole bestial imbecility of this world is kept running by that one nursemaid-word. What does it mean? Where does it get you? In heaven's name——”

“No, but I must go back anyway. I want to see if the place has changed——”

“After how long?”

“Four days, but——”

“Changed in four days? My God, man——”

Unable to cope with this phase of derangement, Fritz subsided. But a moment later he was back to the assault. “Do you think there's no one else who can let off a rifle at a pack of starving incendiaries? Is it your job to be a policeman now? Haven't we done a job together already, you and I? What is this duty, eh? To save Germany?”

And at his own gush of wit Fritz laughed suddenly, his laughter slightly hysterical as if the gleam of poor beer had excited him; until Martin, who had sat glum under his sarcasm, joined him with a heavy, gurgling laugh of his own.

“But I must go back,” he said again. “I want to make certain—to cure myself of the horror of it. If I don't get it fixed in my mind as an ordinary town, derelict and with the life squeezed out but ordinary in every other sense, it'll be a nightmare all my life. If I can only——”

Fritz was staring at him with the solemn gaze of an amateur psycho-analyst. It was odd, he thought, almost amusing—Martin with that paunch of his and a padding of gristle all over his brain, babbling like a crystal-gazer. But a dear fellow——

“But why must we quarrel over this Birnewald?” he said

abruptly. "It's your affair after all. And this is a romantic meeting. It must be—how long? Two—three years? And here we are, both alive, both drinking our beer like barons amid all the blessings of Peace."

His glass was empty, but in pantomime he toasted Martin again, and with his little grin said dramatically: "The Day!"

The joke was not to Martin's taste. "We must have more beer," he said, and called: "Here, waiter, what d'you call yourself?"

A minute passed before Lopahin shambled in.

"That little thing was worth more than a couple of glasses," Martin said. "Get two more."

"I am a tradesman," the Russian answered, instantly turning his back, "not a poor relief officer."

"Here! come back!" Martin shouted. He had taken out his revolver and laid it on the table. "More beer!" he added briefly.

Lopahin saw the revolver.

"Not loaded," he remarked, smiling.

Martin picked it up.

"Isn't it?"

"I shall call the police."

"Good! fine! call them at once." Martin turned again to Fritz. "And what about the others, have you run into any of them? Grotzke?"

Fritz pondered.

"No, I lost sight of him."

"Hans Briese?"

"Dead."

"Täschner?"

"Täschner? Oh yes, he's dead. He went just after you left us. I can't remember quite how it happened. Who was it was moved at the same time as you? A tall boy with big teeth? Oh yes, Vulprecht."

"Oh, he went, gas, I think it was. And Lange, Bruno Lange?"

"I don't know, I can't remember what happened to him."

"And Keuffert, do you remember him? and Minnich? and Elsner?"

"Lord! what a memory! No, I don't even remember them. The names, perhaps. They belong to my nursery days. I feel as if that was before the war began."

Lopahin brought two more glasses of beer.

"That is the last," he said shortly, "I shall be closing the house in a few minutes. It is useless to remain open with no money coming in."

Martin ignored him. "And Gotthold," he said to Fritz, "you must remember him?"

"The colonel? Yes, I remember him all right. Too good for the job. You know what happened to him? Well, he was recalled to G.H.Q. all of a sudden, and I heard that he was being put on to secret intelligence. He spoke English like a native, you know. And he'd got a nerve fit for anything."

"Did you see him again, or hear anything?"

"No, nothing but rumours. I expect the swine got him in the end. They got most of them."

"I'm interested," Martin said, his eyes fixed vacantly on his half-empty glass, "because I knew his wife. A long time ago."

"Oh?"

"A queer creature. Good-looking."

"Ah yes? One used to be interested in such things."

"His relations didn't like her, I don't know why. I met an aunt of his, quite by chance, and asked if Frau Kolonel Gotthold was still in Berlin. She said: 'No. She's gone away somewhere. She refuses money.' That was all."

Fritz blew through his nostrils. "A pity!" he said. "I liked the colonel, he was very decent to us youngsters. A clever chap, too." He finished off his beer. "Well, it's something to have seen the end of history. Come on, let's get out of this lousy place."

They went out together and walked slowly to the end of the wide street. The park gates were open and they strolled inside.

"Well?" Martin asked, "what next?"

Fritz rolled a cigarette, asked for a match and lit it.

"Me? I don't know." They walked a few paces in silence and he went on: "You see, I wasn't prepared for this."

The park was neglected; no flowers, the shrubs overgrown; rubbish on the paths, bits of broken furniture, somebody's clothes. Even in the dark the disorder was conspicuous.

"You mean——" said Martin, kicking a battered felt hat along the path and nodding towards it, "peace?"

"No. Life—if that's the word. Of course, I was always trying for it. No one ever flopped on to his belly quicker than I did. But it was like the habit of buying lottery tickets. You find one day you've drawn a winning number, and the shock leaves you gasping for ever after."

"Still," Martin ruminated, "I could do with a winning lottery ticket. Trouble is, one can't afford a losing one."

Their understanding of each other was so complete that they lapsed again into silence, until Fritz said: "Funny, us meeting again."

"Yes, it's queer," Martin agreed. And he added, in a tone unintentionally lugubrious: "I suppose it will always be happening now. In trains, in theatres, at the corner of a street, at race meetings. Things go like that."

Fritz only repeated, like a child learning words: "Theatres, race meetings . . . ?"

They had reached the other end of the park, and a man on crutches who had seen them through the railings hobbled round to accost them. He said hoarsely: "Ninth Würzburgers, wounded Charleroi, Somme——" and broke into a fit of coughing.

"A use for your lottery ticket, Fritz," Martin said.

They turned about to walk back along the main avenue, but the man hobbled round to their front and continued to pester them; Fritz, with the gentlest push, sent him staggering on to the flower-bed. They quickened their pace a little, and it was too fast for Martin, who was tired and badly wanted another drink. This meeting with Fritz was not being a success, he felt. They were dear friends, as they had been before, but they had nothing to give each other. He should be talking, with a little gaiety, about the old days. After all, they had had their jokes together; amusing things had happened; they had been bullied and enjoyed common hatreds; they had joined, when something had gone wrong about the meat rations, in gloriously damning the French. But he had forgotten how it went, forgotten the taste of that hard comradeship. They were as man and wife whose memory has lost the fears and agonies and hopes of betrothal, and who have nothing to share but the union of spirit, forged long since and now existing without the need of recognition. Who, besides, could recapture the past, the close life that smelt of men's sweat, in this dreary hour and in this bleak patch of ground where nature was kept, untidily, as an exhibit for urban curiosity? Or who separate the warmth and tingle of those months from the privation and the little spring of terror that bubbled always between heart and stomach?

"Where are you living?" he asked, to say something.

As if their thoughts had been moving side by side, Fritz answered: "On the North side. About a mile from here."

Intuitively he knew that Martin would not pursue his question. Only the parting had to be managed now. But as if to give an excuse for his vagueness, suggesting a matter of honour, he added: "There are Jews round there, I repair their shoes. And you? At one of the hotels?"

"Hotels? Are any open again?"

"The Potsdam, I believe——"

"A pity I didn't keep the little Virgin! They might have taken it at the Potsdam . . . well, I've got my railway-voucher, and to-morrow morning I'll be on the train again, so it doesn't much matter about to-night."

They were out in the street again, between the black houses. From a top window a little way down a light was showing, and it went out suddenly. But behind them, on the other side of the street, another light appeared, from a lamp that a policeman held. It threw blurred shadows of the two men against the wall.

"A policeman!" Fritz said. "Quite like the old days! Well, good luck to the burglars!"

But Martin did not hear him. His eyes were fixed on the faint shadows. He asked: "Which way are we going? South?"

Fritz glanced up, but there were no stars.

"I don't know," he said, "South-east; I should think."

The policeman regulated his pace by theirs, and his eyes were on them. Everything was very quiet to-night, but in this part of the town anyone abroad after midnight had to be watched. The shadows moved forward steadily, a yard in front of the two men, falling to the ground where the line of houses was broken by a foot-passage and bouncing up again on the other side; shaky and indistinct. Martin watched them intently.

"Is anyone behind?" he asked.

"No one except the policeman."

It was Martin who now forced the pace, which had dropped to a stroll and increased again to a tourist's tramp. They went straight on over the cross-roads, and on the other side the shadows still led them. The houses here had their lower windows shuttered, but from within was faintly audible the sound of voices. Something, perhaps a sudden devilry, prompted Fritz to leap back to the conversation they had left.

"And what about to-morrow night?" he asked.

Martin gave no answer, and it seemed to Fritz that he had been attacked by deafness; or else was walking with his mind fast asleep. But a moment later Martin asked:

"Do you smell anything? Anything queer?"

"No. Do you?"

Again Martin was silent, and he began to walk still faster, until Fritz panted: "Steady, old man, there's no need——"

But Martin ignored him. He strode on, a yard in front, two yards, and then began to run. Fritz stopped dead and watched him, with a faint smile—it was odd, the clumsy way Martin ran, unbalanced by his huge, loose belly, like a nursing sow. In a few seconds the darkness had swallowed him.

The policeman had come up, and he said, with faint humour beneath his professional *ernst*: "He is in a hurry, your friend?"

Gone, Fritz was thinking. Nothing to keep them together. They might meet again—"in theatres . . . at race meetings. . . ."

"He's dropped a five-pfennig piece," he said to the policeman, "he's run back to see if he can find it."

Back to Birnewald! Like a weight tugged back by a piece of elastic. Or else running away from Birnewald, like a stone shot suddenly from a catapult. In any case mechanical. Well, that was the way to behave, now that the politicians had proved for all time that the fatalists were right. No use struggling.

He gazed far ahead and imagined—but knew it was imagination—that he could still see Martin's ungainly body bumping along in the distance, where the meeting-point of two lines of houses was lost in the dull obscurity. It was time he got back. He said "Good night" to the policeman and moved away.

IX

HE had placed the second candle on the table and was about to light it, but she stopped him.

"One candle is enough," Hedwig said, "we are short of candles."

He was disappointed, for his young eyes wanted all the brightness they could have in that dismal room.

"I shall find some more to-morrow," he objected, "I know a house where——"

"You are not to go out to-morrow. You are not to go out any more. It's not safe."

He should have left the matter, but he could not stop the words:

"I shall have to go, for food. We've hardly any food."

"Konrad will get us some food," she answered, and he said wearily, knowing that he would never make it clear to her: "Konrad's gone away. He won't come back."

To this she made no reply, and Klaus fetched the chessboard, drew up his chair, and began to set out the pieces. Hedwig watched his hands intently but made no attempt to help him. She was better, Klaus thought, much better this evening. It was nearly a fortnight since she had last risen from the narrow sofa in the evening, and she had actually changed her dress, as if to celebrate the occasion. It was the blue dress she wore now, the only evening robe she had brought to Birnewald among the trunkful of carelessly chosen possessions; faded, very badly crumpled, even torn in parts, but preserving in its multiplicity of frills and flounces a relic of the gaiety it had shown when Herr Kolonel Gotthold and his wife, always shy and mysterious, but a handsome and romantic couple, had attended occasionally an evening party in Charlottenburg. In the extravagance of its modelling, even in its shabbiness, which was more of age than of careless keeping, it suited her present features, the features of a woman outdistanced, dry, faded, tightened by experience, not without hauteur; and for Klaus, who had seen her so long in the woollen gardening jacket which she used to hide the disorders of her brown dress, she had transformed herself into the grand lady that he remembered far back in his childhood. At her neck was the gold brooch that Heinrich had given her.

Better, Klaus thought, but still not her normal self. He found that it was difficult, when he considered the question, to fix a time

when he could think of her as in perfect health. At the least it meant going back further than the time when they had left Berlin. But it was enough that to-night she had got up from the couch, had seemed to take an interest in little things—that his hair needed cutting, that there was dust on all the furniture; and though her face was still stone-white, as it had been for so many days, there was a gleam of new brightness in her cold eyes.

"It is your turn to begin, Mother," he said.

Absently she moved her King's Pawn, and for a long time kept her fingers on it, as if it were a bold move to be industriously considered. She sat up stiffly, and her face in the candlelight was like a face moulded in wax. Klaus made his move, when she had taken away her fingers, and mechanically they played through the opening stages.

The shutters, as always, were closed and barred. The fire burned smokily, trying to digest the damp and tough pieces of wood that Klaus had got by breaking up a shed in the garden. In the street outside all was silent except for quick footsteps passing two or three times in an hour, and occasionally the heavier steps of a soldier. Save for a few shots at nightfall, a long way distant, in the shopping streets perhaps, there had been no firing this evening.

"I have forgotten all the moves," Hedwig said wearily, as she shifted her Bishop.

"That was a good one," he replied. "You've stumped me." But she had moved the piece wrongly.

She pushed the board away from her impatiently. "Read something to me," she said.

Without answering, he got up and went into the next room where, among the confusion of unused furniture and dusty ornaments, there was a revolving bookshelf with an encyclopedia and a few odd volumes. He groped in the dark till he found it; flustered, for above all things he hated darkness; and ran his hand along the top of the books till it came to some small ones, two or three of which he took with him. When he returned his mother's eyes had closed and her chin had fallen forward on her breast.

"You are tired," he said gently. "You would rather go to bed?"

She opened her eyes slowly and stared at him, dreamy and puzzled.

"It's your move."

He moved a piece at random, and the game went on, rules and methods disregarded. He said at last, when she delayed several minutes and seemed to have forgotten the game altogether: "I was going to read to you."

She answered without interest: "Yes, you were going to read."

He looked then to see what books he had stumbled upon, and found with pleasure that he had a Milton. He turned the pages quickly and began to read:

*Together both, ere the high Lawns appear'd
Under the opening eyelids of the morn,*

but before he could go further she stopped him.

"What is it you are reading?"

"It's *Lycidas*, mother, surely you——"

She interrupted: "It's English, surely it's an English book. I don't want to hear anything English. I don't understand English. You must know that I don't want you to read English books."

He knew well enough that English things made her angry, but it had not occurred to him that poetry would come under the ban. "I'm sorry," he said, "I thought that Milton——"

"I don't understand English," she repeated.

He answered thoughtlessly: "But when you were a young girl you lived in England. You've often told me, how——"

"I have forgotten it," she retorted, her voice rising. "There was nothing there to remember. It is only a black country full of cruel people."

To stop her, for he knew that on this worst of topics she would whip her weary anger into bright and shapeless fury, he opened another of the books and began to read at random. It was a history primer, a cold, ill-ordered relation of lifeless events, but he read it with a gusto, thoughtless as to the meaning of the sentences, perceiving only their shape and throwing emphasis on to a word here and there when the grammar seemed to allow it. It was enough for his purpose; Hedwig's lips had closed, and though he saw in an upward glance that the train he had lighted ran on behind her moist eyes, he was satisfied that hysteria had been warded off. He turned a page and read on, his voice gradually rising to divert her thoughts by its energy. And when he glanced again she had arrived at confusion; the path of memory which she had traced was in shadow. Without a pause to make the end of a section, without stopping even to glance up again, he hurried on through the deep, closely-set paragraphs, jumping a sentence when he saw a difficult word, a finger inserted ready to flick over the page, faster, his throat dry and the lines beginning to rise and join each other, till she cried abruptly: "Enough! stop!"

He stopped in the middle of a sentence, and seeing by her attitude

that she was straining to hear some quiet or far-off noise he listened too, holding his body still.

"There's someone outside," she said, her voice excited and nervous.

"I heard nothing."

Neither could she have heard any other sound, with his voice pouring over her; but he knew how subtle was her sense of a stranger approaching, and in a moment a sharp knuckle-rap sounded on the front door. "You were right," he said with a little smile, and got up to go downstairs. It was uncanny, he thought, the way. . . .

"You're not to go down," she ordered, "it's unsafe. I don't want them to know we're here. We've got no right to be in this house. If we——"

"I'll see who it is," he answered quietly. In these moods she had to be dealt with carefully, and the duty of soothing her calmed his own uncertain nerves. "Perhaps Konrad has come back, after all."

He went towards the window, but before he reached it she stopped him again.

"You mustn't open the shutters. If they see the light——" She was on her feet now, standing against the table, and her trembling shook it so violently that the chessmen rattled. "Wait!" she gasped, "wait while I hide the candle."

The knock had sounded again. He waited impatiently, his own body trembling a little by infection, while she put the candle in a corner of the room remote from the window and moved a box in front of it. Then he slipped the shutter-catch and pushed one fold a little way open.

"I can't see very clearly," he said when he had closed the shutter again, "but I'm almost certain it's the American. I'd better go down."

"No!" she commanded, with an impressive obstinacy in her whisper. "I won't let him in, he has only come to spy on us."

With the candle hidden the room was almost dark; in the filtered light he could see her eyes, and he was frightened of her; his control was ebbing.

"But why?" he said, his voice low and angry. "And who? Why should anyone want to spy on us?"

"They're all spies," she answered, "English spies. That Dutchman, he was the first. He wasn't what he said—I knew who he was. He paid the American to spy on us. Most likely he paid Konrad too. They got my husband, and they want me now, and you."

The knocking had stopped, and evidently the man had gone away.

Klaus fetched the candle and replaced it on the table. "That's nonsense, Mother!" he said, but she went on, still whispering, still with a voice quite unlike her own. "They're always after me. I got away from them, but they're after me still. They've had my husband, now they want me." Then she muttered a word he had heard her use before, a word he did not understand. "Saggard." "He's gone now," he said loudly, and began to read again, but before he had finished a paragraph she interrupted:

"We haven't finished the game. It's your turn, go on!"

He looked at her face, trying to make his glance appear casual. She sat waiting for him to make his move, impassive, normal, the light flush vanishing from her cheeks. Without plan or purpose he moved a Knight.

"Would you like anything to eat, or drink?" he asked.

"No," she replied, in her practical voice, "we can't eat just when we like. We're nearly out of food."

"But I'm sure I could find——"

"It's your turn," she said.

Presently, when they had idly moved their pieces for a while without giving any shape to the game, she began to talk again.

"When I was a little girl," she said dreamily, "before I ever went to England——" She stopped at that word, and her eyes darkened, and he thought that she would plunge again into her purgatory. But his eager "Yes, yes, mother?" saved her, and she went on, "I used to stay sometimes with my Uncle August at Altenburg. There was a long avenue between tall trees, with grass growing all over the path, and daffodils growing wild. You came to a little house just inside the gates where old Anna lived. She always had fresh-baked bread for me—the house always smelt of baking. Her grandson Franz had one leg in irons, and he had no brothers or sisters. Like me. We used to play together, a game we had made up in which I was the elder brother and we went sailing together. We sailed out to China and all the way round the Baltic sea. He wore a blue smock with green pockets, and I always used to think that he smelt of dandelions. When we had played for half an hour Anna brought us some bread, two pieces for me and one for Franz. She would stay and talk for a little time, and then she had to be off to attend to her cooking. Franz always stopped playing when she came in, and called me '*Fräulein*' and was very polite. I don't think Uncle August knew that I went to see Anna and Franz. There was a lake in another part of the garden, with swans and water-lilies and a boat tied to the bank. I was not allowed to sit in the boat, but I used to lie on the bank and think of myself in the boat, drifting away

towards the middle, and then finding that all the banks had disappeared and drifting on and on till I came to a strange island with a little hut and a cooking-stove in the middle, and red flowers all round, and all the animals friendly and talking. Sometimes I tried to tell Franz about the island, but he always wanted to sail to India and China. Anna's house had only one sitting-room, and the table in the middle was so big that you could hardly get round. There was a picture of the Harz Mountains and the Fair at Florence, and one with children round a Christmas tree. And the head of a wolf that Anna's husband had shot in the forest. Anna had once seen the Emperor in his carriage. One of the horses stumbled. . . ."

Her eyes had closed and she was nearly asleep. Her voice had dwindled away, but her lips still moved, even as her head fell slowly forward. Klaus thought that she might fall from her chair and be hurt. He said gently: "You are tired, Mother, you ought to go to bed."

She had not heard him, and he said louder: "Mother!"

With a start she awoke, opening her eyes with her face turned towards the window. And suddenly she uttered a little scream.

"Look! what's that? At the window?"

He leant across the table and caught her arm, turning his head to look where she looked. The shutters, patterned by discoloration, were firmly closed, the catch locked.

"There's nothing there," he said, "the shutters are closed."

In a voice stifled with terror she said: "There was a face at the window. I saw it."

It cost him an effort to tighten all his muscles, and even then he could still feel his body trembling. But he walked to the window firmly.

"I'll look and see," he told her in an even voice. "Do you want to hide the candle?"

She put the candle under the table. She was crying, not with a great noise but with an *arpeggio* of sobs that passed through her to the table, sending a vibration into the room itself. He ignored her completely and threw open the shutters with a purposeful brutality.

"Nothing!" he said, and closed the shutters again. He had seen a soldier at the end of the street, but he did not tell her. Returning to the table he put his hands on her shoulders.

"You ought to go to bed, Mother," he insisted. "It's tiring for you, sitting up late like this."

"Is it late?" she asked.

"Very late."

She had stopped crying, and she said, "Yes, we must go to bed."

But she did not move. He put the candle back on the table, and she sat staring at it, her body quite still, her muscles exerted only to keep her head upright.

He was accustomed to this phase in her exhaustion, and he knew that no word or action could move her while it lasted, but he was frightened to let her stay in the chair, so stiff, and her hands so cold.

"I'm going to my room—only for a moment," he whispered, and so silently that she might not notice he crept away. But he went to her bedroom, feeling his way through the detested darkness, and returned with her nightclothes. But for her eyes, still wide open, and the upright position of her head and shoulders, she might have been asleep.

He pushed the sofa up to the side of her chair, slipped his arm behind her back, and moved her gently until she rested against the sofa's pommel; then lifted her legs on to the cushions. She hardly stirred to help him, but made no resistance. Her eyes had turned a little to follow his movements, the sensation of movement had occurred in her brain, but in her remote perception there was no reflective consciousness. Klaus dared not exert the force to awake her from that lethargy, but until she would command her limbs a little it was impossible to move her as far as the bedroom. He unlaced and took off her shoes; then, working patiently with his strong, delicate hands, began to take off her clothes. In less than ten minutes he had got her into her nightgown, and still she showed no sign that she was aware of his ministrations. "I must take you to bed now," he said firmly, and with one hand at her elbow, one behind her shoulder, tried to raise her. "You can walk as far as your bedroom, can't you, Mother?" At last she was responding, and with her free arm she pushed herself upright. Then: "Leave me alone, Klaus," she said, and fell back.

Her eyes were closed now, and she began to speak, very low, but quite clearly.

"We were talking about the English——"

"No," he said quickly, "not about that, about when you were a little girl, when you used to stay at Altenburg. You were telling me——"

"The English have a grudge against me," she went on. "I ought to have told you before, but I thought you wouldn't understand. I used—I was in England when I was young, but they sent me away because I went to Glasgow. You see, a German girl was not allowed to go to Glasgow. They sent me away, but they hadn't forgotten me. They knew I had been married, and they thought I was pretending not to mind being sent away. That was why England made war on Germany, so that they could kill my husband. They

sent a Dutchman to kill him. They wanted to get you too"—her voice was sinking—"but I took you away, I hid you here so that they couldn't get you. They'll try again, if they can. The one who killed Heinrich, he will be after you, he'll get you one day if you don't——"

Like a wind that had risen suddenly and made great stir among the tree-tops her voice fell into a moaning whisper and died away. But her eyes had opened again. To Klaus her words meant nothing. He had almost ceased to wonder how much of fact lay behind the story that of late she had told him so often, never twice in the same way, never with the personalities distinct in their rôles and relationship. That Hedwig detested the English, that in her fear and venom she concentrated all the hatred that a nation might feel, making it alive and personal, religious in intensity, so much he could understand; and for that hatred an object was needed smaller than a nation, a nation concentrated in a person, vulnerable, a being that one could picture under the lash. But was that object only an abstraction, or had the dark figures that would leap into her tirades been real, had they played or could they still play a part in the subjacent mystery that wholly ruled his mother's life and as the moon's phases govern the tides had seemed to rule his own? The questions he would have asked had always remained unspoken. It hurt him to know that he seemed indifferent, but he dreaded to make her lead him further along that broken path, a path so dangerous, and on which he might be a trespasser. One day, when the English had gone from the Rhine, when money bought food, when the sentries had marched away from Birnewald and they could throw open the shutters and drink full draughts of daylight, he would trust himself to ponder those unexplained fears and hatreds until his curiosity made him voice his questions. For the present he must keep those things from his mind, must keep his mind clean and strong so that he could chase them away from hers. For a moment the danger had passed—it might come back. Her eyes were open, her body still; she saw nothing. The phase had lasted a long time, and her hands were white, cold.

He was afraid now to leave her, with the lethargy gripping her so tightly. But he thought it better, went out again to the dark landing, and down to the kitchen. When he came back with a kettle of water and some cocoa powder in a cup she had not moved. He stirred the fire, threw on to the glowing coals the Milton, which he thought would burn well enough, and balanced the kettle on top. He had covered her with a shawl that was handy, but he went to his bedroom now and brought back the *Decke*. There was still no hope of moving her, and he wished he had left her in her day-clothes. "Wouldn't

you like to get into bed?" he asked and made one more effort to lift her, gently, for he feared to use all his strength. But she made no response, and he threw the *Decke* over, slipping his hands beneath it to hold one of hers, rubbing it to bring the blood back into the thin, protruding veins. Her eyes were still open.

He sat down on the edge of the sofa, still holding her hand, and when he had waited for a few minutes he left her side to examine the kettle. It had not boiled, but the water was fairly hot and he judged that it would get no hotter, so he poured it into the cup and stirred with his finger. He had forgotten the sugar, but she might not notice that, and he could not leave her again. "Some cocoa," he said. "It will warm you." He held the cup to her lips, and when she made no effort to drink he tilted it a little. Some of the liquid had gone down her throat before the rest began to trickle over her chin; enough, though it was only lukewarm, to make her body stir and to bring a faint colour to her cheeks. Her gaze came round to find his face, but her eyes had no light for him.

Behind those frozen eyes Hedwig's spirit was contented; for she had felt a gleam of sunshine, and though it was only a foretaste it was enough to promise solution. Somehow she had faltered in her lifelong struggle with those cruel figures, her faith reluctant to disclose the foul core that lay wrapped in a shape like God's image; and she saw now that the devil had come out, that the images with which she wrestled were only his hiding-place. She could not see her way, but the road led—she knew that it led—towards a gentle garden that was like the park at Altenburg; where the sun she already felt would be high and blazing.

Though he had stirred the fire once again, coaxed it to a little flame and found a piece of wood for the flame to kindle, Klaus himself was getting colder. In his bedroom he found a coat, an old military coat that he morbidly treasured, and with this thrown round his shoulders the cold air was in some degree subdued. But when the protection of discomfort was removed drowsiness advanced upon him. Hedwig's eyes had closed at last; her hands, he thought, were not quite so cold, and perhaps her breathing would soon deepen to tell him that she had passed from stupor into natural sleep. But that was not what he wanted. He wanted her to answer him when he asked if she felt better; to look at him, to show that she knew him; above all to listen to his voice, intent and understanding. Since the day when he had come home to her in Berlin he had kept his words tight-reined. She had asked no questions, had seemed to forget that there had been anything amiss or unexpected in his sudden return; and though he would have answered her freely he respected her regard for his privacy.

repaid her by regard for her own. Their flight from Berlin, the nightmare journey and their months in hiding had only asseverated that tacit convention. When they talked together easily it was of practical things, food, soap, a leak in the roof, of books occasionally, more rarely—with caution and at a distance—of what was or might be happening in the world outside. Only in her twilight consciousness, that partial retreat of the mind that had become almost as normal to her as periods of sleeping, did she speak of the life she held apart from him; and then he would have dragged her from it as from a flame that licked her, the heat of it scorching his own fingers. But his desire to talk with her, freely as lovers would talk, had remained. Hardly as curiosity, for in the succeeding years his curiosity had starved almost to extinction from a lack of feeding. No longer, except when there was scant matter for his idle thoughts, did he want to see what was on her side of the towering boundary wall. It was the wall itself he hated, shutting her away from him, always reminding him that he must not pry into her territory, constantly standing up against the view that he would have wished to reveal to her. “The Abbey!” occasionally the word slipped into his talk. “At the Abbey we used to——” or “Father”; “Do you remember how Father——” And it was not as if she reproved him, but as if her interest faded, melted away into insubstantiality so that her spirit, too battle-worn to wrestle, should not be wounded; at which his voice tumbled and he stammered, or endured the nervous silence till his shaken wits had found a trivial topic with which to fill it. So the intimate words he had meant to say, kind, endearing things, gentle allusions to the rare happiest moments they had enjoyed together in his early childhood, had been crowded away into the warehouse he kept for them, piling on top of each other into so high a heap that the doors were straining outwards. He had thought (as it is the nature of children to look always for fulfilment in an unknown maturity) that the day would come when he could draw the bolts and release that mounting burden. To-night, when Hedwig had put on her blue dress and sat up for the game of chess, he had seen that day on a far horizon. And now her eyes were closed, and she had been rigid, in a grip more unshakable than sleep, for longer than she had ever been before. Perhaps she was asleep, despite the tension in the muscles of her face and shoulders, and perhaps when morning came she would wake to show again the returning vigour she had shown this evening. But morning was a long way off, and in that wax-like face he could see no more promise of the easy, unshackled union that he had dimly hoped for; he could not picture her listening, nodding, smiling. All the sweetness of communion, the tenderness of naked affection, must be held back, stifled,

for a little longer, for a time infinitely long. He knew with the strange knowledge of children that this cold figure of skin and flesh loved him. But he was still alone.

Sleep was creeping upon him like a dark wolf, wary, ready to spring; a swift end to fatigue and anxiety; but he knew it was there, had his eyes upon it, knew that his will was stronger. The fire, dying into warm ashes, had creaked and murmured for a while, but now the only sound was a regular dripping; he was not sure where it came from, perhaps a loose tap in the kitchen, or perhaps a leak in the roof above his bedroom that he had repaired ineffectually; a monotonous sound, increasing drowsiness. He shook his head sharply and made sure that his eyes were wide open. She might need him suddenly and be unable to call him. He must stay awake till morning.

He had not closed his eyes, or thought he had not, when Hedwig shivered; a violent shiver, lasting only for a second and giving place to stillness; he could not be certain whether he had seen or only felt it from her knee pressing against his thigh. No gasp and no cry.

She was cold and he must get her to bed. He could lift her somehow, he was strong enough, he had been a fool not to do it before. No questions. He put one knee on the sofa in the hollow of her hip, slipped his hands round her back and laced his fingers. At the second heave—all his strength in it and a sharp pain across the small of his back—he had swung her up and over his shoulder. But his balance was not good enough for the weight, far greater than he had expected, and he bent and they fell together between the sofa and the table.

He was quick enough to save her, breaking his own fall with his left arm, catching her about the shoulders with his right. When the shock had passed he turned to see her face. Her head hung loose, the skin of her throat taut with its weight. He shifted his arm and her head rolled over sideways; got up, and she was lying on the floor as if pitched there from a hunter's spear.

So that was what had been happening! He thought now that he had half-suspected it, could not apprehend a culmination of the bitter apartness. Someone had taken a pair of scissors, waited till he was drowsy, and snipped through the central cord inside his head; he could feel the loose end hanging, dripping. Back in the Penitence Chamber.

There were cigarettes somewhere, and he would at least enjoy his captivity. He found them on the top of the china cabinet, and a box with three matches left. The cigarettes were damp, but he lit one and it would just burn. He sat down by the table, cold and rather

bored. In the morning one of the novices would come and let him out; then there was the tunnel; in the meantime he must do something to amuse himself. The history book was still lying on the table, and he began to read again, aloud, so as the better to hold his own attention. Presently the silence was broken by someone knocking at the front door.

He had heard no footsteps, but without doubt it was the American back again. Well, he knew what that fellow had come for. He glanced at the shutters to see that they were firmly closed and sat very still, smiling. For a moment he thought of letting the man in and leading him upstairs. He could wait until his back was turned and then make a jump from behind. There would be a struggle and one of them would win. No. His job was to keep them all away. Hedwig had made that quite clear, and he was not going to be disobedient. She wanted him to protect her, and to read to her. When the knocking had stopped he went on reading. She was not paying much attention, but how could she—he thought with a smile—with her head lying like that, bent right back, almost detached from her body?

The book was not very interesting. He had been reading for twenty minutes now, perhaps half an hour, and could not remember what it was all about. While his eyes were still on the book a shadow of anxiety crossed him. Was the front door properly bolted? Were all the downstairs windows shut and fastened? The American would find his way in if he could. Better go down with a candle and look all round, make sure that all the doors were locked or bolted.

He stood up, took hold of the candle, raised his eyes and saw a face at the window.

"You swine! Get out!" he roared, and caught hold of the chair and flung it with all his force. It crashed against the shutters and fell crippled on the floor. But the man had been too quick—he was gone. Klaus rushed to the shutters and tried to open them. The catch had stuck. It was five seconds before he could get it undone, and when he threw the shutters open he looked out on to an empty street.

It was warning enough. They wanted either him or her—her more likely, and that was all he cared about—and they could creep into places and vanish in a moment. They would get her somehow. . . .

And then inspiration came to him.

On his way across the room he hesitated. She would feel nothing. He ought to say prayers or something, but all that belonged to another life—life on a hill in cold sunshine with a sweep of country bending up into pine forests. He picked up the candle and went downstairs.

There was plenty of paper about, piles of it in the housemaid's cupboard, bits in all the drawers, wrappers of tins, old books and magazines, strips hanging from the walls. He took it in armfuls to the front room and piled it up in the middle of the carpet. Then wood; not so much of that, but a few chairs still stood about to be broken up; those that would not break—he was too impatient to hunt for tools—he pitched on top; finally a table, which was dry and might help matters. Oil. He had taken two drums of kerosene from a house in the next street, and if he was right they had only used up one for the stove. Yes, there they were in a corner of the larder, one full.

When he had sprinkled the oil over his heap, carefully, giving liberal doses to the chairs and table, he was impelled by a kind of curiosity to go upstairs again. It was a relief to find Hedwig lying in the same position; so far they had not got her, had not been near her. He turned her head round, placed a cushion under it, and put his hand over her heart to make quite sure. Then a young Klaus, a forgotten stranger, took sudden hold of his body, brought his arms round her neck and his lips to hers. He rose from that tight embrace to find warm tears running down his cheeks. Something, he thought, must have made him cry. The packet of cigarettes lay on the floor. He lit one, put the box in his pocket, and went downstairs again.

In the hall he stood still for a moment, perplexed, having forgotten what he was going to do. When he remembered he found that he had used the last match, and not till he had hunted vaguely for some time did it occur to him to light a piece of paper from the candle, which he was still holding. The first bit blazed and fell in a curling ash from his fingers. He took a larger bit, folded it carefully into a spill, lit and threw it on the heap. The heap caught and flared like magnesium ribbon, throwing a gust of heat into his face as he stood two yards away. Excellent. He ran to the front door, drew the bolt, and went out into the street.

He was surprised to find snow falling. Already it lay a quarter-inch thick on the ground, enough to quiet his footsteps. Without thinking much of his direction he went quickly up the street, which at the end rose sharply. No one was about who would accost him. At the top of the hill, looking down the street, was a deserted house with no glass in the windows. He decided to go in there, and from the upper windows he would get a good view of the flames.

At seven o'clock Lagenpusch, already shaved and tolerably smart even in his patched and faded uniform glanced out of the window of the Engineers' Club building which served as his headquarters and saw

Rytkönnen coming up the drive with the mail in his hands; punctual, for the third morning running. Things were coming on.

It had stopped snowing, but the sky was still dark with it and more would come presently. There were two inches or more on the ground, and someone would have to be detailed to clear the path. Rytkönnen had reached the step now and was stamping and scraping to get the stuff off his boots. Good man, Rytkönnen, he never wasted any time. Lagenpusch turned in his chair to greet him as he came in, and smiled quickly; debonair, looking young this morning, Rytkönnen thought, though he must be fifty-five, not one grey streak in the black hair that he dressed, since his Heidelberg days, rather in the English fashion.

"On time again, good! I thought the snow might delay the train."

"The mail came by motor-van, sir. From Duisgen."

"By van——?"

"Yes, sir. I understand the line has been ripped up between Duisgen and here. About a quarter of a mile, they say."

Lagenpusch raised his eyebrows, as he did for every irregularity.

"Who did it? Why?"

"I don't know, sir. Pure devilry I should think, sir. Some good-for-nothings from here probably—they've little enough to occupy their time. But there's a rumour that they thought more troops were going to be sent through."

"More troops?" Lagenpusch was incredulous. "What troops? There aren't any troops. The army's all over the country. Nine-tenths of it is drunk. I haven't sent for any troops. I know there aren't any."

Rytkönnen did not contradict; for all he knew Lagenpusch might be right; he didn't know, no one knew anything, you couldn't believe anything anyone told you. And Lagenpusch was in a good humour—you could tell that from the way he barked. There were times when his bark was fearful to hear, when it made officers stammer and apologise and sent orderlies running all over the place. But this was his gay bark, mere *joie de vivre*, just a joyous expression of the fact that he, Lagenpusch, knew what he was doing better than anyone else in Germany.

Already Lagenpusch was opening the few letters with a flourish, breaking each envelope into two parts to make sure that no enclosure had escaped him and throwing it into a cardboard box beneath the table. His eye fell on a Default-Advice and he clicked his tongue, but it did not really trouble him. So some hooligans had ripped up the line, and yet the mail had arrived to time! That showed there

was someone at Duisgen who had his wits about him. What a comfort! Of course he could have made arrangements from this end, he'd have managed it somehow; but it was pleasant, for once in a way, to find that someone had not celebrated the end of the war by turning in his intelligence along with his rifle and the other impedimenta. As it was, he must think about getting the return mail through. . . .

Only five past seven. He would have plenty of time this morning to deal with all correspondence before going his first round of inspection. Things were beginning to fit in very nicely. This place was hardly smart yet, the men didn't look smart—nothing would make them, except the one or two old fellows who had been suckled by a mess-tin; but already—only seven weeks after he had taken over—there was an atmosphere, the sense of clock-ruled existence that was the breath of life to him and that he created for himself, everywhere. Yes, he got it in the end—he had even whipped Turks, during those four happy years, into the pattern to which he was accustomed. What a muddle he had found! Poor old Gressel! (was that the fellow's name?) he'd got things into a fine tangle. Hardly dared give orders; was saying *Bitte* to his orderlies; if they were orderlies and not subalterns—there was nothing to show. They'd realized when he came that things were going to be altered, that there was a shade of difference between peace (whatever that legal technicality meant) and anarchy, that there were still a few hundred miles between the Volga and the Spree. Not that Gressel had lacked excuse. His staff had consisted of all the heavy-bellied poltroons and the mouse-faced midgets that the French had, so to speak, thrown back as not worth the filleting; the men no better; and with irregular supplies of all sorts, with two cartridges in the rebel's pocket to one in yours, with no one who had his heart in this or any other business, it was difficult enough for a chap like Gressel to make a workmanlike show of the "Protective Occupation." "Protective Occupation"—what a phrase! They should send lawyers and professors from Berlin to explain it to the Sergeant. Well, the metaphysics of the matter were not in his line—Gressel could go and puzzle that out in the romantic apple-orchard in Plauen that he had talked about. What wanted doing was plain enough, and if the circumstances were unusual—different, at all events, from those he had been handling during the last few years—the System was yet good enough to meet them. They had, he admitted without undue lack of modesty, chosen the right man. As if sensing intuitively the changed régime the people had become quieter shortly after his arrival. True, there were new difficulties; more men had appeared, had wandered into the town from

nowhere just as if it were not the last place in Germany where they would find anything worth finding; a nasty crowd, too, fellows whose nostrils seemed to have caught the poisonous air that was blowing right across from beyond the Pripet Marshes; and the relief people who trickled steadily into the town with packets of tea and tinned beef in the back of Ford cars, Dutchmen and even Americans—blast their impertinence!—they made themselves a nuisance, distributing their charity quite indiscriminately, nourishing the very element that would otherwise have been starved into usefulness, sending one-sided reports (so he had heard) to all the newspapers in Europe. (There were those who deserved relief, of course; but order first, good-living afterwards.) Well, he had them all under his eye, the civilian police—nit-witted baton-weavers, the makeshift municipal servants, the greasy traders who had already arrived to scratch the soil until money was born again. He could hardly say that the situation was in hand. But things were quieting; in a few minutes now the post-midnight patrols would be coming in, and already the morning patrols would be forming up, Number One for the North-East quarter under Hennenber, Number Two for the Five-Ways district under Kittelmann . . . How like old times, when he had the sector between Pölcflour and the Figet! And by midday, unless the road was blocked as well as the line, the cross-wire he had ordered would be through, so that the fencing off of Nielstrasse could be begun; with any luck a small consignment of corned beef and oatmeal, which would mean three-quarter rations again for the men. . . .

Rytkönnen was still waiting for orders—he would have waited all day, while Lagenpusch tapped his nails on the table and scowled at communiqués, unless formally dismissed. Lagenpusch looked up and said: “Send Markfort—he should be in by now.” Waiting for Markfort, the mechanical part of his brain checking the totals of the columns on the Hours Sheet, he saw farther ahead; not as far as a reborn Birnewald—the factories going, curtains in the little houses, all the shops open, youths and girls dancing outside a market-square café to the tune of a fiddler, industry standing upright, self-assured, ready to assert itself—but to a Birnewald with no arrests and no killing, the patrols reporting “all correct” every morning and evening, a complete register of all houses in neat volumes along the shelves, arrivals and departures meticulously recorded, the office cleaned up and made to look more like a barrack-room, new uniforms for the men, some sort of occupation for the mobs of demobilized vagabonds that were now making sporadic trouble all over the town—musketry practice, perhaps, or a range they could build for themselves; quiet, order, perhaps one day an invitation to dinner at a big house in Potsdam,

when Potsdam was back in its proper place. ("You have done very well, Herr Kolonel; in recognition of your services. . . .") But that was only an afterthought; he would be content, then as now, with a job worthy of his mettle, and in the world as he knew it there were always jobs for the patient, logical man who could tell the difference between a straight line and a muddle, who knew that control came before and above what the young fellows called *Die Menschlichkeit*. There were not so many, since that happy August day.

Markfort had come in and clicked his heels.

"Anything to report?" Lagenpusch snapped.

"Nothing, sir, except that we saw a man in the Krapppstrasse who made off when we challenged him. We fired after him, but I don't think he was hit."

"Did you give chase?"

"Yes." Markfort, blue and watery with nervousness, began to stammer. "But he—disappeared."

Lagenpusch fixed him with a ferocious eye.

"That's no good! I've told you before, you must get hold of these fellows, whatever else you do. Shoot to stop 'em, by all means, but we can't have men going about with flesh wounds telling queer stories. There must always be a statement. Surely you—you're supposed to have a university diploma, aren't you?—surely you can see the difference between this job and war?"

Markfort could have developed his idea on that subject in some detail, but he had grown wiser.

"Or are you too fuddle-headed to realize that the war's over? You've had time by now, God knows! In war you shoot a man and trust to luck he's not wearing field-grey. When there's not a war on you have to enter the name of every man you shoot in your note-book, the same as you do your travelling expenses, with all the details you can get hold of. As long as we have a clear statement we're all right. But a statement's no good without a name—you can't just say 'I shot at a fellow; I may have hit him in the backside.' It's not likely, of course, but technically—supposing there happens to be a government at the moment, and for all we know there may be—there's a possibility of a civil judge arriving any moment and empanelling a jury and asking God-knows-what questions about anyone who's going about with a brand-new bullet-wound in his face. So long as we have a complete record—well, remember another time! Anything else?"

"Nothing re patrol, sir——"

"But re what? Come on! I haven't got all day."

"You told me to inspect F Store-room, yesterday."

"Yes. Well——?"

"There were some rye-biscuits I couldn't account for. I——"

"How many?"

"Two tins."

"Door locked before you went in?"

"Yes, sir, but there were two planks loose in the wall. It looked to me as if——"

"Of course it did. Who was on guard?"

"Klömpen. He said he had his eye on a man who was hiding behind the wall, a little way down the road, and kept bobbing up."

Lagenpusch, to relieve his feelings, caught hold of his own ears and twisted them, sucking his breath sharply through moist lips.

"And that—God help us—is what nowadays we call a soldier! I suppose Engelhardt checked over before he put on the guard?"

"Yes, he initialled the book at ten hours. He recorded six tins."

Lagenpusch looked at his watch.

"All right. Send Engelhardt to me."

"And may I go to bed, sir?"

"Yes, if you can think of nothing else to do."

The man who came in four minutes later, having tapped at the door with the knuckle of his middle-finger, had sold ladies' hats in one of the most high class shops of Darmstadt. He had kept everything, his life and limbs (the French, they said, had been too courteous to fire at him) his winning smile, his ingratiating gestures, even a semblance of his mincing gait. Just once he had been too obliging, and when his friends were fighting for a place in eastbound trains on their way to see what was left of their little businesses, a captain running his pencil down the list of names had decided that a man so meticulous in his attention to little duties, so bullyable and so resilient, would be unlikely to slip away, and worth the keeping.

"Good-morning, Herr Kolonel."

Lagenpusch ignored the compliment.

"It is my business," he said, "to restore order to this town. I have been given to help me a gang of half-wits——"

"Yes, Herr Kolonel——"

"Half-wits, cripples, and paralytics. Now I should be interested to hear your opinion as to which is the most incredibly stupid of all the men under my command."

Engelhardt cocked one of his little eyebrows, one side of his moustachelet rising in sympathy; and to complete the gesture of judicial consideration he pricked his forehead with his little finger. But he was not really pondering. Since the previous evening he had been waiting eagerly for an opportunity of telling the commandant,

without malice but as plainly as his delicacy would permit, what he thought of the conduct of the man Klömpen.

"Without doubt," he answered after a discreet interval, "Gefreite Klömpen!"

Lagenpusch rose, put his hands on the table, and leant forward.

"Then why, in the name of the nethermost hell, did you pick on him to guard a store-house?"

Engelhardt raised his mild eyes, calculating the exact degree of Lagenpusch's wrath, nicely gauging the likely consequences. All his life he had been stormed at; his father had trimmed him with sharp, scathing rebukes; schoolmasters had whipped him with their choicest sarcasm; when wrong hats were sent, or right hats to the wrong address, the blustering Fraus and Fräuleins had charged into the shop and slaughtered him with their tirades in the presence of his gaping subordinates; and to him the war had been the history not so much of short rations, dirt, discomfort and horrid expeditions in the chill hours of early morning with the star shells flooding unholy light upon him, as of Prussian officers, every one larger than the last, broader in the shoulder, taller of helmet, fiercer in moustaches, all towering above him to vent the fury that he had occasioned by the loss of a bayonet, the failure to report a man missing or the unspeakable act of losing his unit altogether and being returned with a laconic message by a neighbouring Captain. This much he had learnt: that thunder passes; that in his small way he was useful; and just as the angry ladies who flayed him with their tongues yet knew that he alone had the art of placing a bow or a feather just where it made this model right for them alone, so the Jupiters who crushed him into anthood remembered that if papers were lost he knew where to find them, if there was doubt about a previous general order he knew the text of it, if new-pattern gas-masks had been issued he alone, when the order was suddenly given, would tell his senior officers how to put them on.

"I have reprimanded the man, sir," he said nervously. "I've given him a thorough dressing-down."

Lagenpusch snorted.

"And left him trembling in his shoes, I expect?"

"He was very cut-up, sir. I told him he would certainly be court-martialled."

"Yes, and I suppose you think I've nothing else to do all day but to hold court-martials? Court-martial be damned! We're under war conditions, how often am I to tell you that? Klömpen will go on patrol with pack and full equipment till further orders——"

Engelhardt hardly waited to say: "Yes, sir," before clicking his heels and turning about. Lagenpusch followed him with a gaze

that he could almost feel between the shoulder-blades; but he had got off this time. There was something else Lagenpusch meant to say, but the appropriate thing would not come. Well, perhaps a warning was enough for the feeble-witted chicken. To provide a climax suitable for the intimidation of Engelhardt and the relief of his own feelings he picked up a paper-weight and threw it at the door.

"And that's the sort I have to rely on for this simple little job," he said aloud.

But the System was greater than the several units. He was going to prove that now, if it had never been proved before. If it had never—and at that the thing he had tried to forget shot through his brain like an icy needle: the last months, the sense of a universe tottering, the order to cease fire, the arrival of the news in a briefly-phrased communiqué, when for the first time since childhood he had found his eyes wet and his lips quivering; the trains going off, French soldiers—but that was some mistake, something unthinkable, never to be remembered. Like the prophets of Baal he had cried aloud and cut himself, and the fury still dwelt in him like a warm fountain. To-morrow . . . !

He stretched out his hand and rang the improvised bell for his orderly.

"But I tell you," Markfort said, shuffling the pack, "we're in clover here. Look at old Martin, he was given a week's leave to see a specialist about his syphilis, and back he came like a boomerang. I hardly knew he was gone. Your deal, Engelhardt, I've shuffled for you."

"I will re-shuffle," said Engelhardt, taking the cards.

Slumped in his chair opposite Markfort, his chin on his chest, his cod-like eyes pouring a mildewy gaze over the table, Martin Steinke said nothing. Engelhardt licked his thumb daintily and began to deal.

"They do say," he remarked pleasantly, "that things are much worse in Vienna."

His partner, Beuloh, took another sip from his glass of Goldenwasser.

"Vienna? Ach!"

"A jolly place," said Markfort, "—or used to be. It would be a good plan, perhaps, to send His Highness the Lord Almighty Lagenpuschedapopulos to put things to rights there. Yes, brother, you gave me three cards the last time round. Probably the trouble with the Viennese is pure slackness. They were always a happy-go-

lucky lot. Our dear Lagenpusch would have the whole lot paraded every morning at six o'clock to see that they'd all mended their stockings and cleaned their teeth. I almost feel that we ought to suggest it."

"It would be hard to spare him," said Beuloh, "but we must be unselfish. By the way, I hear you were on the carpet again?"

Markfort sighed as he put down a Spade.

"'Tis true, brother."

Beuloh grinned. Older in years and service than the others, he was long past being mortified by his own frequent appearances before high authority, and he found subject for gentle rejoicing in the suffering of his less pachydermatous juniors under Lagenpusch's strictures. (Lagenpusch! a chip, a mere splinter of the old block that he had seen rotting in the humid climate of fifty months!)

"What for?" he asked. "Not properly shaved?"

"No, failing to enter full details of man winged."

"How so?"

Markfort took the last trick and gathered up the cards.

"Down near the river," he explained. "A fellow was wandering about—I suppose he was drunk, though I don't know where he got the stuff—in 'such a manner as to provoke suspicion.' He'd got no right to be there at all, not at that time of night, anyway. You know His Highness just can't bear to think of any good citizen not being tucked up in bed at ten."

"I seem to have heard something of that sort. So I suppose you spoke to him like a grandfather and put a slug in his stocking just to make things clear?"

Markfort sniffed.

"I suppose that's what you'd have done. You'd shoot a man as soon as beg his pardon, anyway. I know, the great tradition of the German soldier——! Well, I personally would have been careful not to notice the little misdemeanour, but I had Melzer with me, and he's so damned conscientious and enterprising—always hoping that he'll one day be promoted, God bless him—that he must needs go and accost the fellow before I could stop him. And the fellow quite naturally did a bolt—you know what Melzer smells like when you come within three yards of him. He was a pretty lively bolter, too. So then, of course, for the sake of peace and good order, we had to let him have a round."

Beuloh nodded slowly without lowering his glass.

"Well, that seems all very right and proper. Quite in the tradition, as you're pleased to call it. And why all the fuss?"

"I forgot," said Markfort, "to write down what size collar he was

wearing. And his Highness says that without that we can't institute civil proceedings for causing unnecessary expenditure of government ammunition."

"Of course you can't," said Beuloh decisively. "You should have thought of that. I've always said that directly the Armistice was signed they should have given all the young officers their papers and left the real soldiers to deal with the revolutions and things. When it comes to managing——"

"But I don't quite see," Engelhardt interrupted. "What if the man wasn't wearing a collar——?"

"Ah, then," Markfort said quickly, "he would have been fined under the Public Morality regulations. Yes, it's your partner's ace you've just trumped. By the way, I'm afraid I let you in for a little bother."

Engelhardt waved his hand. It was a privilege, he always felt, one of the little compensations for privation and nostalgia to be on student-club terms with these *vornehme* gentlemen.

"Don't mention it!" he said. "I got off quite lightly. The Commandant was really very reasonable."

"Well," said Markfort, "he didn't seem to me to be frightfully pleased about the affair. Martin, old chap, do wake up just for one moment and put a card on the table; any card will do. No, he struck me as distinctly huffy. After all, a biscuit's a biscuit these days."

"As far back as I can remember," Martin mumbled, "a biscuit has always been a biscuit."

Markfort turned to Beuloh.

"Does he mean anything special by that? He's got so damned cryptic ever since he came back from his leave."

Beuloh with one side of his face frowned at him.

"Leave him alone!" he said in an undertone. Then: "What's all this about a biscuit? Was Engelhardt caught stealing a biscuit?"

Engelhardt shuddered.

"My gracious, no! I've never had any need to steal."

"Well then," Beuloh said solemnly, "you're the luckiest man in Germany. How do you manage it? Does the little wife send parcels of tuck? If so, why haven't we heard about it before?"

"My wife is long deceased," Engelhardt answered.

"Good for her!" said Markfort cheerfully. "It's the best thing that can happen to wives these days. I can tell you, if I had the chance——"

But Beuloh stopped him. He had seen the blood coming to Markfort's face, just as it was running away from Engelhardt's, and in another moment there would be a scene. That would spoil the

little party, and it was seldom enough that four of them could get together for half an hour's cards. It was a curse, with these young fellows, you never knew when their nerves, twisted too early in the death-factory, would jump them into a spasm of rage or abject misery or brittle buoyancy akin to intoxication.

"All right, all right!" he said sharply. "I want to hear how Engelhardt managed to pinch Lagenpusch's biscuit."

For another moment Markfort rushed on: "What I say is, if one of the women in this place was my wife I'd take my rifle——" but when Beuloh threw the remaining contents of his glass at his head he subsided. "All right," he said. "And I wasn't talking to you, anyway."

"But I didn't steal the Commandant's biscuit," Engelhardt persisted. "The biscuits were stolen from F store-room. Everyone has been reprimanded," he concluded.

"But how exactly did it happen?" Beuloh inquired of Markfort.

"Well, Engelhardt was responsible. He put Klömpen on guard—you know the man, the fellow with unsymmetrical warts on his nose—and went off to bed."

"That's not true, pardon me——" Engelhardt interrupted.

"And went off to bed," Markfort repeated. "The brilliant Klömpen then lit a cigar and strolled about for a bit until a fellow came and told him that a red serpent with five heads was dancing the tango in the next street and he had better come and restore order. So off he goes, and in the meantime a fellow comes up and lifts two boards out of the wall, collects a couple of tins, and disappears; intending no doubt to come for the rest at his convenience. When I arrive on the scene and find the tins gone Klömpen reports that the boards have been gnawed through by earwigs and the tins carried away by a high north wind."

"Considering that those stores have got to keep us—and the men—alive for a couple of months, probably," Beuloh said with judicial severity, "it hardly seems a subject for levity."

"That, roughly, was the view taken by the Lord of All Creation," Markfort answered.

"And," said Martin (the topic of food had ever been one to stir him into utterance) "since for all intents and purposes we get no pay, since we get no fun, no credit, and no promotion from this job, we might just as well look after the miserable rations they've given us."

Beuloh, surprised at so long a speech from the very emblem of taciturnity, swung his horse-like gaze in Martin's direction. "You know, Martin, it puzzles me——" he began, and immediately stopped.

"Anyway," said Markfort, "it's your go at seventeen hours. You'll have to find a guard then, and the toughs are pretty lively about

sunset. You might do worse than ambush yourself as a second line of defence."

Martin raised his eyes to stare at Markfort childishly. He realized that he was being addressed, but the words had stuck in the outer layer of his brain. He got up. "I must be going," he said.

"And remember," Markfort shouted after him, "if you see a fellow pinching anything, take his name and address first, then shoot."

The door slammed.

"But I don't really see——" Engelhardt began.

"You know," Beuloh cut in, "you don't treat Martin properly. He's a dear old thing, only a bit wrong in the upper story."

"It always seems to me," said Engelhardt, "that he doesn't altogether know what he's doing. Have you noticed how absent-minded he always seems to be, especially since his leave?"

"I say, Engelhardt, are you a student of character?" Beuloh inquired.

"Well, in a small way——"

"We always thought so," Markfort said warmly.

"What I mean to say," Engelhardt continued, "is that——"

He was interrupted by a sharp rap on the door and the entry of a sergeant.

"Is Herr Leutnant Engelhardt here? Excuse me, sir, one of your men's gone—Gefreite Klömpen."

"Gone?"

"Disappeared, sir. Bunked."

Beuloh whistled four notes.

"Another?" he said softly. "That's three in a week. Don't they like the food, or what is it?"

"Ungrateful bounders!" said Markfort. "The Commandant will be very hurt."

Engelhardt had risen, straightened his uniform and bustled after the sergeant, as crestfallen as if he personally had mislaid the absentee. Markfort stood up and drained his glass.

"Well," he said, looking at his watch, "it's time we were moving. Can't lounge about all day."

Beuloh followed him to the door, his heavy carcass swinging like a milk-churn. As Markfort opened the door he put a hand on his shoulder and rather roughly turned him round.

"A bit jumpy to-day, aren't you?"

Markfort said: "Jumpy? Am I?"

"You know," Beuloh said slowly, his eyes fixed intently on the younger man's chin, "I don't like to see a fellow of your sort getting all played-up, losing grip. Of course, I'd be drunk every night if I

could find the material, but I'm only an old soldier. I suppose if it wasn't for all this you'd be teaching or pleading at the bar or something?"

"Would I? Perhaps, I don't know. Anyway, that's—blown to bits. If there was a job I wouldn't take it. Couldn't stick at anything. Better here."

Well, it was not his affair, Beuloh thought. Of course a man ought to settle down to his job in life before——

"I say, Beuloh, you know that fellow I was talking about, the one Lagenpusch had me on the carpet about?"

"Yes——"

"He's on my nerves. I shan't get a decent night's sleep for weeks."

"Not get a——? My dear fellow, whatever are you raving about?"

"You see, I didn't just wing him, I killed him. I'm pretty certain. Got him right in the middle of the back. He was on a wall and he just dropped down the other side. I told the sergeant I'd missed him and he'd got away. I was nervy you see—I loathe that street. But I heard him squeak, I'm certain I did. I don't suppose he died straight away. It may have taken him an hour."

Beuloh looked at him curiously.

"But there's no need to worry," he said, almost paternally. "There won't be any questions asked. The fellow was up to no good, so you can bet your life there won't. No one does ask any questions these days. Besides, anyone might have plugged him, and if they—

'But the squeak! My God, if you'd heard——"

"If I'd heard? My good little Victor, you were practically weaned on cartridges—was that the first time you've ever heard a man give his little squeak——?"

"No, not the first. In the war, but——"

"Well, this is a war of sorts, isn't it?"

"In the war," Markfort repeated, "I was perfectly used to it. But I always felt there was something decent about the war——"

"Did you, b' jove!"

"I mean it was straightforward. The other fellow had his gun as well."

"So has the other fellow in this case, nine times out of ten. And there's a hell of a lot more of them. When it comes to being heroes, that's us, here and now."

Markfort bit his lip, exasperated by Beuloh's obtuseness. It was several seconds before he could speak.

"But one's own people——?"

"In a state amounting to revolution——"

"——and the smell of this place—don't you ever notice the smell? I don't know what it is, but this is the most hellish place I've ever been in. It's piled up with rotting corpses and evil spirits; it's as if the breath of hell was slowly scorching it, it——"

"Then bunk!" Beuloh said tersely. "It's quite easy. All the others have got away without any difficulty. Wait till Lagenpusch is on his rounds. Keep clear of the patrols—you know where they're likely to be. Walk to the nearest place—to Duisgen for preference—they won't recognize you there, and your uniform won't tell them anything. Avoid the ordinary trains. Take——"

"No!" said Markfort decisively. "I'm going to see this business through."

"Why?"

"Well, just look at the position. Think of Lagenpusch. His men disappearing every day, no reinforcements, two officers gone——"

Beuloh wringing his hands, shouted: "Lagenpusch! Lagenpusch! Who in hell cares what happens to Lagenpusch? My God, man! if that's all that's keeping you here—why, what in the name of reason has turned you into a drivelling sentimentalist? What does Lagenpusch matter, to you or anyone else? Lagenpusch!"

Markfort was crimson.

"Then what are you doing here?"

"Me? I'm here because I like it. I like soldiering when there's no sort of patriotic nonsense attached to it. If I had any——"

"Well, I'm here," Markfort said between close lips, "to finish off this business. You can't just let things run. I'm going to see the end of this show, if it means killing every bloody citizen in Birnewald."

He turned and walked away. Beuloh, following him closely down the stairs, addressed the back of his neck in quieter tones.

"You know, Markfort, you're like all children, you take yourself too seriously. You've got no sense of proportion. You imagine that if only the Creator would hand the universe over to you you'd get things right in no time. You've got large-minded ideas about good and evil and all the other metaphysical clap-trap, not to mention loyalty and what-not, and directly you see someone having an uncomfortable time. . . ."

The snow at least did something to hide Birnewald, and it was better hidden; the heart of it had been patched by successive innova-

tors to make a jig-saw of its medieval purity; it had sprawled unreckoning as far as the hills, sprouting high chimneys; and in the dark years it had faded, not to mellow age, but to a shoddy drabness, smutty, tattered and leaking, a gipsy camp with its untidy squalor fixed for eternity in brick and concrete and rusting iron. Even Böttcher noted the improvement with some appreciation, as he gazed unemotionally over the white roofs. Quite pretty! he thought, in spite of the gloomy sky hanging over it; at least a change from the ordinary view, which he had looked at till he was sick and tired of it—he was always getting picked for this job, and to a countryman the everlasting slate and brick, shutting him in on every side, was like the annihilation of holiness. As long as there was no more of it. But a few flakes had already drifted across the path of his vision; blown from the roofs perhaps, but there was not a high wind. One or two had lighted on the barrel of his rifle; one, a large one, on the end of his nose. There would be another two inches on the ground to-morrow morning.

He had a good view down the street to where it turned, a hundred yards or more away, and it was empty. There might be someone hiding behind the wall, but he did not think so. Unlikely that anyone would come before nightfall, and then, if the snow fell hard enough to blot out vision, there might just as well not be a sentry. He would never hear them if they crept up from behind, and he couldn't be peering in every direction all the time. Yet he must stop them somehow—Herr Kapitän Steinke had said he would have him flogged if anything was missing when the next guard took over. And the Herr Kapitän had meant it. He, Böttcher, had been in the game long enough to know the difference between the swashbuckling threats of young men with brand-new commissions and the purposeful, cruel emphasis of those spluttered words: "And look here, Böttcher, if anything's gone I'll get you peeled, see? I'll have you belaboured till there's not a square inch of your body you'll want to let anyone touch. Don't forget!"

But as like as not, if anything happened, Steinke would be cheated of the pleasure. The character of the town had changed in the last two or three weeks, Böttcher had noticed that. When he started on this job there had been the women who went at you with their fists, easy enough to deal with, and the tired-looking men who rushed out from a side street to throw a bottle or bang off a gun if they had one, missing the target more often than not. There were new men now, he had seen them on patrols. Where they came from God alone knew, and why, unless by some law of nature the microbes of all the world fly to a plague-spot. Different, yes.

They had a look in the eye—not unlike that queer look Steinke had, when he came to think of it. And it wasn't their brains that were missing. They'd learned a thing or two since 1914 had swept them into the trenches, and they had forgotten nothing; how to use cover, when to run, when to fire, how to find out things. If some of that lot came this way they wouldn't wait for him to blow his whistle or fire. He'd know little enough about it, only the excruciating moment when the point of the bayonet driven between spine and shoulder-blade found his heart. In the morning Herr Kapitän Steinke could stick red-hot skewers into every part of him if he so pleased. And then perhaps they would have the sense to move these stores into the main building, even if it meant the officers sleeping in their mess-room.

At present the town might have been deserted; not a movement, not a sound, no smoke rising. It was colder. The world was freezing into stiffness, and he himself was turning into a white pillar. Soon there would be nothing alive and moving but the snow-flakes which fell steadily now, still sparse but never broken. He walked the regulation paces, turned and came back to his point. Too tiring, for he had done double-patrol to-day and it had not been easy going on the slippery snow; it was hard enough having to stand upright. Well, thank God, he was not on patrol to-night!—he pitied those fellows, with the snow gradually increasing in intensity and night-patrols on one-third coffee-ration. Very stiffly he ordered arms and stood at ease. He had no gloves—his old pair had been worn to threads and no new supplies came through. Nothing, he thought, could be so cold to the touch as a rifle. But it was too cold to stand still; his feet would turn into ice and his boots would freeze to the ground. He sloped arms and paced again.

Perhaps the fellows who were going to slide about in the dark streets, holding on to each others' rifles while the sergeant cursed them, were really luckier. Still, one could not have it both ways. It was going to be a painful business getting his boots off; he had done a few months on the East Front and he remembered. But that was hours away, and when it came he would be so glad to have four walls round him that he would hardly mind. If his hands were still fit for anything he would cut the boots and replace them with Sachsenkeller's. Sachsenkeller was detailed for the midnight-patrol and would be sleeping. Sachsenkeller's feet were bigger than his, but that was a fault on the right side—he could hardly have boots too big with his feet in this condition. Curious that they had never shrunk again to their former size—the doctor had said they probably would. Perhaps when he got back to his farm

the swelling would disappear altogether; when he could walk bare-foot in the Mid-Franconian soil, and Mathilde would rub them with vegetable-ointment. But to-night would do them no good, and if the cold weather continued he would be completely lame again. A rest would be all right, but they would find something to keep him occupied, even if he was on his back. How stupid of him not to have put on a second pair of socks. Sachsenkeller had an extra pair which he could have borrowed.

It was all but dark, and the snow falling thickly, when Böttcher saw what he thought was a man moving, on the near side of the road, keeping close to the low wall; just a shadowy blur which changed its position. He watched it first without much attention, since his brain, which normally went with a plough's motion, had been chilled by the cold air and visionless solitude. And when he remembered that watchfulness was the main part of his duty he began to wonder if his eyes had played false with him. He turned round quickly, apprehensive of all attack from the rear, and when he looked down the road again it appeared to be empty. The lamp which hung above the door of the Engineers' Gymnasium further up the road swung a little in the light wind, and its feeble yellow light created and destroyed dim shadows at every slight bend in the walls. On the nearside there were three shadows now more definite than the rest, and none moved.

Far away, somewhere in the centre of the town, a church bell was ringing; the faint notes came evenly; no other sound.

To make sure that his eyes were in good order Böttcher blinked, and when he stopped blinking there were no longer three shadows, only two. But he was till uncertain—he might have made a mistake before. He watched the nearer shadow carefully, allowing himself one sharp blink when his eyes grew hazy, and at length he saw it divide. His heart beat a little faster. Quite unmistakably now the shape born of the shadow was moving, very slowly, towards him. His instinct was to fire, but the pause of a second was enough to tell him that he stood a poor chance; to frighten the man was not sufficient—thieves who were missed came back again. He held himself rigid. The man was bold, he thought, bold or merely clumsy. He himself would not have come straight up the road, right opposite a sentry; he would have climbed into the timber-yard and come up from behind. It occurred to him then that he stood right in the shadow of the building, that the snow was thick all over his great-coat, and that the wall behind, brown and partly whitened by the

driven snow, was his perfect background. So far he had not been seen.

The church bells had stopped and in the total silence a trivial movement would betray him. It was hard to stand so still, when another man might be creeping up behind, but he must keep his chance of one capture. The shape had been still for a long time, but was moving again now, more cautiously than before, only just perceptibly; a decoy would not have had the cunning to advance with such precision—that was a comfort; but it was known that there was food in the building, and more than one man might have thought to try his luck. The thief he was watching could not have made the attempt before or he would have known where the sentry was posted; but he was on the alert, moving now with fine caution. Böttcher watched him with admiration—he knew his job that fellow! A year or two before they might have been doing it together, out to scupper a machine-gun post that had been giving trouble and was too nice a mark for the heavies. He had reached the end of the wall now and would have to do the rest on his belly. Böttcher would let him come another four yards, and then it would be a fairly safe shot. He waited.

In another twenty seconds his nervous impatience had grown too strong; he was an imperfect soldier. He raised his rifle slowly, brought the butt to his shoulder, levelled the sights on the low target and took first pressure on the trigger. The man still wriggled forward, evidently suspecting nothing. He would have waited another few seconds but the cold had weakened him and he could hardly feel the trigger with his bloodless finger. He pulled. There was a little click, no explosion. It took him but a half-second to re-cock, and he pulled the trigger again. The second cartridge failed to explode.

The man had heard the rattle of the bolt, and he was up and running for the road, bent double, twisting. Böttcher did not stop to try a third shot, not even to blow his whistle. He had only a dozen yards to catch up. He dropped his rifle, jumped the four steps down from the terrace, and ran in headlong pursuit.

He knew, almost at the moment when he started to run, that he was acting against orders and discipline; but he was confident in the soundness of his instinct, certain of quick success, and he had gained more than half the distance before he had time to think of the for and against. It would be a triumph—the Herr Kapitän would be delighted—they would pardon the technical breach of code—the man was a poor runner—almost in his grasp—another four yards. His legs were nearly insensible with the cold. The

vigour of his rush was all in his mind and in the upper part of his body. His feet slipped, first apart then back and away from him. He fell full length on the ground.

He got up, spat the snow out of his mouth and brushed it from his eyes. He stood still, but only for a moment; there was one thing for him to do, to regain his post and pray that no one had seen his futile puppy-chase. He had started his lumbering retreat, shaken and a little frightened, when curiosity made him turn to see if there were any signs to show which way his man had escaped; and there, only a few feet away, the thief lay on his face in a deep drift of snow.

As still as death. "Cunning!" Böttcher thought. He approached warily, the snow muffling his footsteps, went down on one knee, and in one swift movement turned the man over and knelt on his arms. The man hardly moved to resist or to struggle for release. Böttcher found his torch and switched it on. "I've got you!" he grunted.

A white face, too young for the military coat the boy was wearing.

"What's your name?"

"Gotthold."

The voice of a child half-asleep.

"Got any arms?"

"No."

Böttcher searched his pockets and felt up his trouser legs.

"All right. Get up! Put your hands above your head."

"I can't. I'm too tired."

Böttcher cuffed him across the cheek.

"Go on. Up with them!"

"I'm too tired."

The boy's legs looked as if they would give way beneath him. He seemed only half-awake. Too real to be acting, Böttcher thought.

"Put them behind you, then. Link your thumbs. Now quick march!"

Böttcher walked a yard behind.

"I've got a revolver," he said. "So if you try any tricks you know what happens."

But the boy did not appear likely to try any tricks. He stumbled forward slowly, slipping at every pace, lifeless but for the movement of walking.

"Buck up!" Böttcher commanded, giving him a prod with his knee; but the boy went no faster.

Alight with pleasure and excitement at his good fortune, Böttcher had yet to consider what was to be done with his captive. He could whistle and hand him over—that was the proper course no

doubt—but Grubner, who was Corporal of the Guard, might come to believe by morning that he himself had effected a small, if not a major part in the capture; and Böttcher had risked and suffered too much to be generous. Then he remembered the fuel-cellar beneath the store-room; it was empty, he knew, and the key was in the door.

“Turn left!” he commanded, and followed his captive along the path that led round to the back. “Halt! stand where you are, don’t move!”

He went down the steps, flashing his torch alternately on the boy’s hands and the cellar door. Yes, the key was there. The lock was rusty, and with his ice-cold fingers he could hardly make the key move, but it turned at length and a hard kick forced the door half-open.

“Come on, now!”

At the threshold the boy stopped and turned his head.

“Can you give me any food?” he asked.

“Food!”

“Yes. I’ve had nothing for hours. That’s why——”

Böttcher blew down his furred nostrils—he was too cold to laugh—and with both hands on the boy’s shoulders sent him tumbling into the cellar.

“Food!” he repeated, as with the point of his bayonet he wrenched the key round. His thick lips parted in a little smile.

But the affair had not passed without a witness. From the roof of a tool-shed just inside the timber yard two keen eyes had followed every movement, had seen the thief creeping forward, watched the dark mass that must be the sentry, seen his rifle go up, seen him drop it and dart forward. Before Böttcher had reached the road, a slim figure had darted across to the side of the store-house and thin fingers with long nails were feeling along the wall. What luck! The third and fourth planks, Max had said. They were fixed again now, but perhaps it was only a couple of deals nailed across inside. A good blow with the shoulder—there was no time to lose. Noise enough to wake the dead, but it was the only way. A second blow and one plank had moved. One would be enough, if two had been enough for Max. The creak of drawn nails, another thrust, and it was down. A match, quick! No time to select; two small packets, sugar with luck; four tins, fruit or fish. Max had said it couldn’t be done again; he was wrong. Another match. Room for three more packets, two small and one large, and one more tin. Then a few potatoes, there was a sack of them on the floor.

That was a full load. Through the hole again, a moment's pause to jerk the plank roughly into position—they might not notice it. . . .

But there was the sentry coming up the road. Back! close to the wall! He wouldn't see. And, by all the saints, he'd got the thief walking in front of him. Must keep quite still, wait for a chance. They came on together, both slipping and stumbling, odd, drunken shapes against the snow. They were level with the end of the terrace. They had passed—the prisoner was going to be taken to Headquarters. Temptation. There was time for another brief forage; a tin of condensed milk, perhaps—it would be worth two of sardines. Last match. . . .

Apparently there was no one about, Böttcher thought, as he made sure that the door was fast locked and replaced his bayonet in the scabbard; but you could never be sure, and on the road anyone could see him. He was still not quite certain about his position; fine, to have made a capture, but it was no sentry's work to rush helter-skelter upon impulse, down the road; no excuse to say that the cartridges were duds—he should have made certain about them beforehand, and Steinke would only laugh if he said the snow had something to do with it. With that in his mind, he was against being seen on the road again; too much light there; an idle observer might say a word to Grubner, Grubner would come to ask questions, and Böttcher's story was not ready yet.

He turned left, then, and continued up the path, which sloped steeply to the level of the terrace, finding it at the back of the storehouse; and when he reached the terrace, stopped. A smell, so faint it was only the shadow of a smell, had reached his nose; a smell that was familiar but that he could place, not of tobacco but connected with smoking. He listened intently, and thought he heard a sound like the rustling of paper. Imagination, no doubt. Darkness breeds noises of itself, he had cause to know that; and smells too, perhaps; but he went on cautiously, thankful once again for the carpet between his soles and the gravel.

Four paces, and he paused again. No sound. It had been imagination, or the boy in the cellar had caused it—yes, he should have thought of that explanation before. Thinking of his rifle which still lay on the snow, satiric tribute to his military training he went on boldly and turned the corner. A slight, soft form pitched straight into his body. He caught it, and a voice screamed.

Gradually, as the rhythmic pounding in his head became less heavy, Klaus awoke to his surroundings. All the material of his

sensation—the small patch of light, high up, against the darkness; the close, hard walls; the cold air—was in part familiar, though something was lacking and the smell had changed. He still knew only vaguely the route by which he had returned; he remembered, now, how skilfully he had crawled, foot by foot, along the wall, and then flat on the snow, wriggling forward like a snake; he remembered running full-tilt down the road; but the rest had vanished, and behind that adventure lay a chasm which his memory would not cross. He was hungry. The sense of imprisonment, that he felt now as a state decreed inexorably, a fire through which he must pass (if there were another side) in every one of the long succession of lives through which a man travels, did not make him afraid; for in this circumstance his capacity to fear was all but exhausted. Only there remained the pain of conflicting forces, his desire to struggle against the closing trap and his aversion from the toil and sores of struggle, the last spiritual agony of childbirth and of drowning. Yet hunger was uppermost, more closely present than cold or captivity; for it was hunger—of so much he was aware—that had made him come back.

His hand groped in the deep pocket of his coat for the coin that had lain there. It had disappeared. His finger poked sharply into all the corners of the lining and then wrenched off a button which he put in his mouth. The button brought faint relief, as his tongue lifted, sucked it and jerked it against his teeth. But his body sought other occupation, and his hands began to grope eagerly within the radius they could find without his body moving. They felt the uneven brick surface of the floor, fingered some of the stray lumps of coke that were scattered all over the cellar, ran up the walls and tore through the matted cobwebs. Presently he got up and stood shakily on his feet, with his head bowed beneath the low ceiling. Without attention he measured with his stretched arms the limits of his prison. One way, both hands touched opposite walls; from the door, he could take a long pace before his fingers touched, and at that end the wall was concave. Something had changed. He fumbled at the door for a while and found a quarter-inch of the key protruding through the keyhole, but it was not enough for his frozen fingers to grip, and had he somehow grasped he would still have had too little strength to turn it. So much the worse, or so much the better. There was no food outside the door, only snow thick on the ground and perpetually falling. He would wait awhile until he got warmer—the walls at least broke the wind and the flying snow—and with warmth a little of his strength would come, enough for a plunge against the wall that would put an end to hunger.

With his feet he brushed the pieces of coke away from a patch on the floor, and after trying once more to nip the key between his finger-tips he sat down, his back against the rounded wall and his knees drawn up. With the button locked fast between his front teeth, his tongue caressing the under side to make saliva, he stared idly at the prick of light in the door, half expecting, though he did not know why, that the door would open. And in a few moments he heard the key turning.

He sat without moving as the strip of light broadened to a rectangle. He could see then a blob of darkened umber almost shutting out the paler grey. There was a noise of leather squeaking and a mumbled "rein mit Dir!" The blob, unfolding, shaped itself into the outline of a soldier, and immediately the door slammed to shut it off. But something had remained inside, on the floor, almost touching him.

He said: "Who's that?" and was answered by a scream. "It's all right," he said, "I won't hurt you."

For a moment the light of the ventilator was blocked out, and Böttcher's voice said: "You're both going to be flogged—in the morning."

Klaus waited till he had gone away, and then repeated: "You needn't be frightened of me. I won't hurt you."

The stranger had retreated as far as possible, and sitting against the door was sobbing, not tearfully, but shaken by fright. Klaus made no attempt to go nearer, but his eyes peered into the darkness towards the stranger. For a few seconds he had forgotten his hunger, forgotten himself altogether. He was interested, almost joyful, in the arrival of a companion, eager to establish relationship, wholly absorbed by a turn of events so unexpected. Until the sobbing had died down he held silence. Then he spoke again, very softly.

"I'm glad he caught you too. I hate being alone."

He was answered then, in a small, shaky voice.

"I didn't know—there was anyone else in here. You gave me a fright. Who are you?"

A queer voice, he thought. Someone younger than himself.

"My name's Gotthold," he said, still speaking almost in a whisper, "Klaus Gotthold. What's yours?"

"Berta."

Yes, a girl. It had dawned on him before she had said her name. She asked. "How did you get here?"

Turned back, thus, upon himself, he did not know what to answer. "It started with Erich," he said confusedly. "A dirty little Jew. He kept on saying I was English——"

"But how did they catch you?"

"A man told me there was food here. I didn't see the sentry."

"That's what I was after," she said.

"Food?"

"Yes."

"Did you get any? Have you got any?"

"Yes, but he took most of it away. I've still got something that he didn't find—it was hidden in my drawers."

"What is it?" he asked. "Quick, I must have some. I'm famished. You must give me some."

In his eagerness he had crawled across to where she sat and was leaning over her.

"All right!" she said, "all right!"

She fumbled in her clothing and held out something; a piece of cheese. He broke it and gave half back. The other half he stuffed into his mouth.

"Anything else?" he asked.

There was a tin of something, two army biscuits, half a pound of sugar in lumps, which when she released them rolled about on the floor. Klaus took the tin, found a penknife in his trouser pocket, and jabbed at it savagely till he felt oil running over his hands. At first he thought it was only blood but found by tasting that it was fishy. With the knife stuck in the hole he had made he levered back the top until there was room for him to work two fingers inside. He picked out two fish and handed one to his companion. Together they scoured the floor for the sugar, which was mixed up with pieces of coke, and as they found the lumps they crammed them into their mouths with the brisling. At the end of the meal they sat silent, side by side.

"It's warmer on the other side," Klaus said at length.

They moved across.

"Have you any matches?" Berta asked.

Klaus fumbled in his pocket.

"Yes, one. I don't know if it'll strike."

"Good! I've got a cigarette."

She pulled out from the top of her stocking a wisp of American tobacco rolled in a piece of paper, slightly damp, and tore it in half. Klaus struck his match cautiously, lit his own half and then hers. While the match burnt they stared curiously into each other's faces. It was not a good smoke, but they made it last till the burning paper scorched their lips, and it did more than the food to blunt the edge of Klaus's hunger.

"I'm glad he didn't find that," he said.

"I wish I'd got back with all of it," she answered thoughtfully. "I went back for more, like a fool, while he was catching you, and then I ran straight into him. Now all I get is a flogging."

"A flogging?"

"Yes, didn't you hear him? One for each of us. Two for me, because Gustav will whip me when I arrive back without any food. It means that he'll have to go and hunt himself for a change."

"Do you live here?" Klaus asked.

"In Birnewald? Yes, of course."

"Have you got parents?"

"No. Never had. Thank goodness. Have you?"

"Me? I don't live here. I live in Berlin. We've been staying here."

"We?"

"Mother and me."

"Where's she?"

"My mother?"

"Yes——?"

He paused. He was not certain about that. It was one of the things he no longer bothered about, knowing that if——

"I think she got burnt," he said. "Have you lived here always—in Birnewald?"

"Yes. Never been anywhere else."

"It's cold, isn't it?"

"Yes, I'm freezing."

"Do you think they'll leave us here all night?"

"Sure to."

He wished there were light enough to see, at least dimly, the outlines of the prison. He was nearer now than he had been for a long time to understanding it all, and he wanted to understand, but with the darkness thick about him and only the tactual sensations—the grit on the floor, the ragged pieces of coke—to lead him on to discovery he had not the strength of mind to follow. Enough that he was no longer alone, even if the cold was sharper, his stomach emptier, than they had been before. If Brother Laud was going to give him a whipping it was better that there should be two to face him.

"It was my last chance," Berta was saying. "Max says he's found out they're going to move all the food to-morrow. They only left it here while they were nailing up shelves in the main building. Max got to know one of the sergeants and he told him. I said they ought to make up a proper raiding party, but Gustav said they would only sweep it away with their machine-gun. Max said, as I was the smallest, and not much use for other things. . . ."

But Klaus was listening only with his ears and her words meant nothing to him. She seemed eager to talk; her failure had made her morose and fretful, while his had been only a half-expected reverse; for his sheer hunger she had the humiliation of defeat. Well, let her talk on if she wished. It gave him a reflected calm, her preoccupation with the luckless escapade; her cool disregard of the terrifying uncertainties which made his own life a falling from ledge to ledge, a procession of unjoined twilights; the patience of her body under the cauterization of emptiness. Perhaps she had eaten more than he in the twenty-four hours past. And perhaps talking helped to keep her warm.

He stretched out his hand to feel her bare arm, and it was as cold as his own.

"Come nearer," he said, "I'll warm you."

She pressed herself close to him, and he put his arm round her shoulders. For a long time they sat upright, her voice still running on, sleepily, and when from weariness he fell over on to one arm she fell with him. His elbow would not bear the weight for long, and he wriggled forward till he could lie flat. His head lodged itself between two large pieces of coke, and he found them sufficient pillow. Discouraged by his silence, Berta had at last stopped chattering. She twisted restlessly till her chest was on his stomach, her knees drawn up close to his side, and presently fell asleep. But to Klaus sleep did not come so easily. Physically he was ready to yield to it, despite the spearpoint of his hunger which would have fenced it away; but his thoughts were wakeful, hard and glittering like the flashes that a man with sunstroke sees against his closed eyelids. Erich, talking quite plainly but refusing to answer the question he kept on putting: "Why did you say I was English?" The sentry, the click of his rifle-bolt. But the rifle had not gone off—why? At least Berta's body was warming him, and he was thankful for that warm comfort against his loins. He stretched a hand down to rest it on her shoulder. It was nice to feel a human being breathing. Something was going to happen in the morning, but he could not remember what the sentry had said.

Outside, Böttcher brought his rifle to the slope, hoisting it like a four-days' recruit, and paced his pitch once again. He could not move fast or long enough to get warmth, but at least it kept him from falling asleep. He was a pillar of snow, and the snow was still falling, thicker, if anything, than before. From the last top-window of the Engineers' Club the light had disappeared, meaning that Lagenpusch had snuffed his candle and got into bed. In half an hour Böttcher would be relieved. The town below him was

still and silent, though somewhere in those streets the patrols must be moving. Over there in the north things might still be happening, he guessed, even in this empty, frozen hour; men awake and plotting, another crisis being manufactured; but he knew nothing about that, hardly cared. The men who might be crouching just inside the timber-yard were enough for him to think of, and even that alarm could not flutter the heart beating so slowly in his cold body. To his tired eyes and frozen ears it seemed that beneath the snow the town was petrified, that the earth itself was fixed eternally, without mind and without motion.

Grubner's heels were at least six inches apart as he stood talking, but Martin affected not to notice. He hardly did notice. There was something faintly disrespectful, something out of order in the man's attitude, but no one respected Martin, he knew that well enough; no one respected anyone (except Lagenpusch) in these days, when the job was only a rope that just kept you from drowning. Grubner's calmness, on the other hand, was sufficiently irritating to a man in his state of nerves.

"What's that?" he asked irritably. "Asleep? asleep in the snow? How long had he been asleep? Why hadn't he been relieved? Speak up, I can't hear you! Why wasn't he inspected? Not usual! Damn it! what are you there for? I'll have the man flogged. Who was he, I forget. Böttcher! I thought he at least was reliable. Where's he now? In bed? My God! what's he doing in bed? Ill? You mean to say——"

The snow had deprived him of his evening walk, and though the walk was poison it was a poison he craved for when the time came. He had gone to bed with a sensation of lust unsatisfied, had lain awake long, tossing on the coarse blankets. He had woken early with the sense of unfulfilled desire fermented into anger. He had wearied himself by his efforts to get to sleep again, the cold air from the broken window intensifying his discomfort. And before he was half-dressed Grubner, with the bare ceremony of a finger tap on the door, had invaded his privacy.

What was the man saying now? Broken into? A plank loose!

"Was Böttcher wounded?" he asked savagely. "Nothing wrong? Not a knife or a bullet-wound? You mean to say he just fell asleep? Fell asleep! Can't you make him say anything? He must be conscious by this time—he's not actually dead, is he?"

But the shock was stimulating his brain into a show of reason.

The important thing, yes, the one vital thing, was to prevent Lagenpusch knowing. "Have you got anyone who can carpenter?" he asked sharply. "Yes—who's that little grey fellow?—Scheel—he can use a hammer. Send him down straight away to make a job of the hole. He must do it decently, so that nothing shows. And look here, Corporal, nothing is to be said about the affair, see? It's most important that it shouldn't leak out into the town. Our position would be gravely damaged. I shall make a full report myself——"

He was summoned, however, only half an hour later.

Lagenpusch was brief.

"I was forced, as you know, to use that place for stores for a day or two. I thought it was possible that between the lot of you you could protect it for just that time. And it's been broken twice. You were warned. Well, I can't punish you straight away. I haven't, frankly, the imagination to think of anything properly suited to the depths of your stupidity. I'm simply going to report the case in full and wait for advice. In the meantime you will regard yourself as under arrest, and will leave your quarters only for purposes of duty."

It mattered not one pfennig, Martin said to himself as he trudged through the snow to the armoury. They couldn't do anything. The whole thing was merely stage effects, form without substance; discipline had ceased to depend on anything but morale, perhaps (he thought cynically) on anything but habit. Morale had almost gone, and even habits could at last be broken when they were entirely divorced from reason. His only wish, at that moment, was for coffee and a cigarette.

No, that was not all. Lagenpusch. He wanted to get back at that swine. Stupidity! To be called stupid by a stuck-up boots-and-spurs of a professional soldier. What did Lagenpusch know about anything except drilling and parapet-construction? He had been a fool to come back here and listen to insults from people like that. Couldn't think why he'd done it. Well, coffee.

He picked up a belt that was lying on the bench and swung it with all his strength against the rifle-rack. That for somebody!

In the late afternoon, coming off duty, he went down to the storehouse to examine the repair. Old Scheel, good tradesman that he was, had made a neat enough job, despite the crude tools available. Martin examined the inventory book; tested the lock on the door—he might as well cover up the brook, now that the child had been

drowned—and went round the walls. Passing the steps that led down to the cellar he thought he heard a sound; a little, stifled cry like that of a child weeping beneath the bed-clothes.

The key was in the door and he tried unsuccessfully to turn it. He would have made more effort, but the cold fright that always hovered beneath his shoulders when he took his evening walks had suddenly, with that stifled cry, attacked him. He shivered and ran up the steps, whistling lest he should hear the noise again. Grubner! Where was Grubner? He made his way to the men's quarters and found the corporal half-undressed, preparing to have a sleep before his night-duty. Appropriate revenge, he thought.

"Has anyone any right to be in the cellar?" he asked.

"Which cellar?"

"The cellar beneath the F store-room, fool! And 'Sir' when you address me, please."

"No, Sir," Grubner mumbled. "It's empty. No one's any right there."

"Well, there's someone there now. Go and find out who it is."

He went back to his own quarters, his cheeks frozen and his forehead sweating under his cap. That smell, it had never been stronger! He lay down on his bed, feeling as if he were in a high fever. There was a bottle with a teacupful of gin hidden behind his clothes-trunk, and he emptied the gin down his throat; but it made him feel no better, only increased the sweating. To-night was going to be worse than last night.

In a few minutes Grubner came to report, triumphant, as far as his fatty features would show the emotion.

"We've got them!"

"Got what?"

"The thieves. Both of 'em. A boy 'n' a girl."

The news was exciting enough to bring Martin to his feet.

"Where are they? What have you done with them?"

"They're in the gymnasium at present, sir. I've posted Mehlitz to keep his eye on them."

"All right. I'll be down there presently."

On his way to Lagenpusch's office he tried to twist the story into a suitable shape; if he could only introduce an element of astuteness on his own part Lagenpusch might be forced to make an apology. It was surely not impossible, by altering a detail here and there, to make it sound as if the whole thing had been elaborately prepared. But he had reached the door before the story had taken any convenient form. He had better go in and do what he could with it. He gave one loud knock and marched in.

Lagenpusch was there, in conference with Beuloh.

"I'm busy," he said, "get out!"

Martin, his face white and teeth together, said: "I've got important news, sir."

Lagenpusch said under his breath, audibly: "Our useful little officer," and aloud: "It can wait for ten minutes. You can wait outside."

For ten minutes Martin waited; eleven; twelve. Then, in a sudden fury, he stalked off to the gymnasium.

It was a queer pair of prisoners that he found waiting, sitting side by side on a legless vaulting-horse: the boy in a ragged military greatcoat that came down to his ankles; a striking face, strangely blended of the puerile and the masculine; eyes that looked keenly forward into the distance that the brick wall of the gymnasium shut off: the girl older, perhaps, but poorly developed; thin, a narrow face drawn out into a sharp edge made by the line of nose and chin—nose long and pinched, a tiny chin delicately modelled like that of a fashionable lady of the seventeenth century; her sparse, corn-coloured hair cut raggedly at the level of her neck and hanging every way about her face; a dark blue cotton dress, so torn and thin and skimpy that it hardly hid the few clothes she wore beneath it; a solemn expression, alert, painstaking. Each held the remains of a piece of rye-bread and half a sausage, and they were munching voraciously. Mehlitz, a greengrocer in soldier's uniform, leant against the wall to watch them, sucking a lump of ice, interested and faintly amused. His rifle was propped a yard away from his left arm.

At Martin's entrance Mehlitz reached for the rifle and came to attention; more alertly than usual, more as in his war days—from respect not to the uniform but to Martin's face, which was stretched and livid as storm-clouds. The prisoners stopped eating.

Martin, with a glance all round, asked: "What have they got?"

His voice in three words reduced Mehlitz almost to incoherency. He murmured: "Some bread, sir, and——"

"And who gave them bread?"

"They were—half-starved, sir. They hadn't had——not for hours. I thought I couldn't——"

"So you think that the best way to treat those who steal our food is to entertain them to dinner? What do you say? Your own? Yes, and who said you were given food to do what you liked with?" He turned to Grubner. "Here! I'm going to teach these two something. Get that lad's clothes off. I'll deal with him first."

The struggle lasted only a few seconds—the weight of it was Berta. Once Grubner had got her by the arms and given her to Mehlitz, now sufficiently alert to hold the girl firmly, she stopped screaming and watched the proceedings quietly, only with her teeth dug fast into her lower lip and a scarlet spot in each of her white cheeks. Klaus hardly resisted as the corporal stripped him, and when Martin's belt fell his cry was nothing but a gasp.

The flogging was nearly over, Martin's ferocity drained by the physical exertion, when Markfort, passing on his way to the storehouse, came in. With a stride forward he caught Martin's arm.

"That's enough, Steinke," he said.

Martin faced him, trembling a little and short of breath.

"Yes, I think so. I'm going to do the girl now."

Markfort said: "Give me that belt, Steinke."

Turning away, and with the belt grasped firmly, Martin said: "The girl now, Grubner. Get her ready." But in a second the belt was wrenched from his hand.

Grubner stood still, uncertain. Herr Kapitän Steinke was senior, but the other officer was sober. He was still grasping the boy's arms and realized all at once that he was holding him up, not keeping him down. It was in every way an awkward business. He let go of the boy and his eyes roved from the officers to the girl, limp now in Mehlitz's arms and her eyes closed, and back again to the crumpled, bleeding body at his feet.

Markfort had gone to the door and pitched the belt far out into the snow. He was back, and kneeling beside Klaus. Martin, a little way off, with his shoulders leant against the wall, was fumbling for his cigarettes.

"You can let go of the girl, Mehlitz," Markfort said. He had got the boy stretched on one of the jumping mats. "And now go and get some brandy, there's some in my quarters, and in the meantime send a man down with a bowl of warm water, and a sponge, and anything he can find that'll do for bandages. Go on, move!"

Berta's eyes were open again, but her forces seemed to be spent. She sat down on the floor and watched Markfort curiously, hardly recognizing the object to which he was attending. Grubner, now certain of his better course, was attempting to help. From his place at the wall Martin had his dull eyes fixed on the group. He had found a cigarette and it was in his mouth, but he did not light it.

Before Mehlitz was back with the brandy Klaus had come round. The water had arrived first, and Grubner held him, writhing and whimpering, while Markfort got to work. Lucky, Markfort thought, that the boy was so toughly made; and that men blind

with fury use their limbs none too skilfully. Steinke had made a clumsy job of it—he was no professional lictor, too fat to begin with. Nasty weals, but nothing much worse as far as he could see. A devil of a mess though, and the boy might have suffered severely from shock. It would be a case for Heckhausen. But to think that Martin, of all people——!

Returning to his quarters a little after four in the morning Markfort found Martin sitting on his bed, half-undressed.

He asked abruptly: "Why my bed? Fleas in yours?"

"It would be a change if there weren't," Martin replied without humour. "I wanted to talk to you," he added.

Markfort was already unlacing his boots.

"I don't feel frightfully conversational——"

But Martin would not go. "I've not been able to sleep," he said. "At least, I don't think I've slept. I'm not sure."

Markfort was unbuttoning his breeches.

"I'm afraid I can't tell you anything about that."

"Look here!" Martin said fiercely, "you've got to listen to me! I've been sitting here over an hour waiting for you to come in. I want you to tell me something. You've got to tell me."

"Go on then! What is it?"

Martin sat down on the bed, got up again, ran his fingers round inside his collar. Now that he had come to the moment he dreaded putting the question. Either way he would look a fool. But it had to come.

"Was I drunk yesterday—last evening?"

Markfort was ready for bed, and without ceremony put himself between the clothes.

"Of course you were," he said inattentively. "Drunk or mad. I never know quite which you are."

"Well, that's one thing," Martin said, calmer at having got so far. "Now tell me, have you ever seen me give anyone a flogging?"

"Fairly recently——"

"A boy?"

"You damned fool!" Markfort said sleepily, "why do you ask such——"

"I only wanted to be certain, I thought—I was hoping I'd dreamt the whole thing. I can't remember clearly—anything that happened yesterday. I've been dreaming things ever since—it's this smell there is round this place—and I can't sort them out. I thought possibly it was only what I—thought of doing."

At last Markfort was aroused a little. He leant out of bed, took hold of the candle, and deliberately raised it to get a better view of Martin's face. Martin bore his scrutiny, his eyes wandering aimlessly over the bedclothes.

"What happened to the boy?" he asked.

"He came round all right. He's badly messed up, bruises the size of dunghills, but nothing more serious than that. You're a poor hand at flogging, luckily. I found a meal for him. That's what he really wanted. The girl too."

"What has Lagenpusch done?"

"He doesn't know. I took damned good care he didn't."

"For my sake?"

"Good God, no! I've never liked you very much, Steinke, and my affection hasn't exactly grown. I'm easy going, but I have my limits. The boy was half-starved——"

Martin stopped. "I know. I know. I mean—no, I hadn't any idea of that when I started. I mean, I know what you think of me, and——"

"And now I'd like to go to sleep, if you don't mind."

But Martin only came closer.

"Look here, Markfort, you don't understand. You're younger than I am, you were moulded into soldiering before they had time to mould you into anything else. It hasn't affected you."

"What hasn't?"

"The war—and all this. This place, the smell of it, and the men looking like jackals. The streets!"

Despite his weariness Markfort was listening, curious to hear Martin, middle-aged at thirty, corpulent, phlegmatic, childish in intellect, talking to him like that. He had had a nasty time again on the patrol. There had been more of them about, the men they all referred to as 'grey strangers'; fellows that the luckier towns had got rid of and who made for Birnewald as damned souls sank into hell. And some of the originals, men he recognized now, were looking bolder. The sight of the patrol advancing no longer cowed them—there was a new truculence abroad. And in this centre of all the plague storms that had swept over Germany, he, according to this morose, stout little bourgeois, was affected by nothing. Too coarse and too callous, bred for it too young, Steinke thought.

"My nerves don't happen to be the type that find relief in sadistic orgies," he said.

"I don't think you've got any nerves," Martin answered; but he was no longer thinking of this youngster. He had begun to walk up and down, only two paces each way from wall to wall of the

narrow room, stepping rather precisely like a dancing-master; interested, apparently, by the way his toes were pointing. "If," thought Markfort, "he can really see them over that belly of his."

"No, you're right. I've got no nerves," Markfort said. "I've always enjoyed the war and all that. As for this, this is pure happiness. Good food, easy work, congenial companions, adequate opportunities for recreation, delightful locality. Friendly fellow-officer to tuck me up in bed. Wouldn't give it up for anything."

But Martin had gone from the room and was already out of earshot. In another minute he had left the building and was standing ankle-deep in the snow. For a few moments he hesitated, wondering whether to go back and see if he could find any spirits. No, if he did find anything it would only dim the picture for half an hour (provided there were enough of it) and he would come round to suffer the torture and to face the whole thing over again. Markfort hadn't said what he had done with the boy, and he was terrified that he might see him. He went on, making a new track through the fresh snow towards the armoury. It might, of course, be locked.

Markfort had got the hard pillow in the right position under his neck, and was nearly asleep already. But his mind in its *ralentando* was still on Martin. Poor fish! Poor—fish! Markfort could almost sympathize—the fellow might have had something resembling character once, who knew? Certainly his face had shown a being that was far away from the Martin Steinke they knew, as he had paced ridiculously backwards and forwards. Not remorse, precisely. Fear, and an anguish more bitter than remorse for a single act of vicious cruelty.

He turned over, and opening his eyes for a second saw that the candle was still burning, its flame faint against the growing daylight from the window. He reached out to snuff it. Perhaps he had been too uncompromising with Martin; there was no doubt that the fellow was loathing himself now, and in that condition the blackest-souled man deserved a trifle of friendship.

He forced himself to get up, stumbled to the head of the stairs, and called "Martin!" but got no answer.

Old Jajonek, peeping out from the top window of the four piled-up rooms which made his home, was mightily amused to see Berta and her perambulator. He grinned and tittered, and then roared hoarsely, his tobacco-stained saliva splashing on to the window-ledge, his brown cap falling over on to one ear and exposing his skull in all its immense, extenuated baldness. He called for his

granddaughter Klara to share the jest, but she was in her bedroom with the door locked, having one of her sick headaches. Well, well, he could enjoy it himself, and tell her about it afterwards, retailing the story piecemeal between his coughing and his tooth-picking throughout a whole meal, if she had found a meal for to-night. He had not laughed so much for many a day. Indeed, there was little enough to laugh at in these thin times, though the instinct for vulgarity that he had cherished and nurtured all his life, found a ripe ear in the leanest cornfield.

Dull days, when even the children had ceased to shriek and slap each other and roar with mirth or pain as they tumbled about on the pavements; when everyone spoke half in whispers and there was a constant: "Hush!—grandfather will hear," among the women-folk. As if he didn't know! He knew all they had to tell him and a lot more besides. He had come to Birnewald in his teens when it was a mere market-town, had watched it grow up, sprawling out over the country. Pursuing boisterously his trade of a barber, keeping those customers who had a taste for his lewd jokes, losing any chance visitor who had the smallest respect for religion or morality, drinking all the money he could keep from his wife, watching with amusement the growing respectability of his growing family, he had seen the electric tramway starting and now, in these strange months, had seen it stop. Sometimes of an evening he walked as far as the crossroads and noticed that a part of the line had been torn up. That showed him. The place had grown too fast, and now it was slipping back again. That was how things went in the world. That was how he himself was going, back towards childhood; but not just yet. Eighty-eight, and he didn't feel more than sixty. No, there was not much that they could tell him. The war was well over now; the French—curse them!—had won, but it was no good crying over that; it would make little difference to him ten years hence. And the lads were all back, and some of their friends from other parts with them, and they hadn't settled down, not by a long way. He had heard guns going off and seen a man drop dead right under his window. They were idle and rowdy, they had got beyond the *Polizei*, and the Kaiser had sent soldiers, regulars he supposed, to teach them their manners. Quite right too. They had been brave lads, he didn't doubt; there were some of them lacking a leg or an arm or a side of the face as a proper German should, as he himself would if 1914 had found him a little younger; but it was time they were getting back to quiet ways, and he was grateful to the soldiery for coming to make it plain.

It had worried Jajonek, given birth to an irritation which was

growing into gusty anger, this constant restlessness. There was a lack of food in the house; Klara was always complaining when she thought he could not hear her, and from time to time she came to him openly with a tale that her money would not buy anything, hoping, he supposed, that he would give her some more from his private store. Ridiculous! there was plenty of money; his son Georg had opened a branch in another part of the town where the clientele was wealthy, and Willy was still working it, unless he was idling with the rest. Food? Of course there was no food if no one did any work! He didn't mind so much for himself, he had lost all his taste for it, and it wanted little enough to keep him going, but the others were always complaining. Well, why didn't they do something? Why had the factory horns stopped going? Why were there no carts or vans passing along the streets? For weeks he had seen nothing but people walking, old men like himself, young scamps out for mischief, girls with pinched faces and flat chests, all looking as morbid and humourless as his old wife Flora, who had died ten years back from—he maintained—the festering of holy religion in her stomach. And there were the factories still standing; he could see two of the chimneys in the gap at the end of the street from where he sat. The boys had burnt one or two for fun, they told him, but the rest were still waiting for food and things to be made in them; and the country all round—that, surely, must still be there, ready to grow corn and potatoes. The shops were all standing along the streets as they had always done; many with the glass broken, but that could soon be put right. And there were the banks, and a good part of the electric tramlines still intact, and all the roads only waiting for someone to repair them. Plenty of work for everyone, and no one did any. An idle lot, that was what they were, and the sooner the military rounded them up and got them into the workshops the better for everyone.

At any rate, it was finer to-day. The little blind street, sunk down in the lowest part of the town, was a trap for all the stifling heat of summer, and yet served through all the winter months as a funnel for every bitter wind. It was, by the same token, a reservoir for the snow, which at every fall piled high on the pavements, silting against the doorways so that it fell into the front rooms when the doors were opened; and here it remained, brown, sodden, and clogging the narrow gutter-drains, long after neighbouring streets were cleared. Jajonek, now that he was past the age for wrapping a pebble in the snow and hurling it at an adipose old lady, detested snow and the cold that came with it. The east wind penetrated through the heaviest clothing to his worn bones; the snow on the pavement made his little walks impossible. So he was pleased to see a faint, equinoctial sun

peeping through the drifts of rising clouds, and he looked eagerly to see the first signs of thaw which would promise both warmth and release. Already the thick layer on the window-sill, which the night before had been brittle to the gingerly touch of his cold fingers, was becoming soft and damp. More people were passing to-day for him to see; a couple of soldiers who had turned at the end of the road and come back; a few of those young men he so distrusted, sneaking along close to the houses, up to no good, he was sure; then women, emerging cautiously from their houses and joining to stumble up the street in groups of two or three—the tall woman who had her hair twisted into a high cone which rested on the very top of her head, the girl in the dark green dress with a little mouth always fixed in a vertical oval, the fat little woman with a sailor's scarf and with big vaccination marks showing on her bare, fat arms. It gladdened old Jajonek's heart to see them all again. And now this young girl plodding along with her ridiculous perambulator.

Such a perambulator! a crazy old thing like the one in which Flora had pushed his own babies, as rusty as an old doornail, the big loose wheels wobbling every way, sticking in the snow every few yards, and always trying to run away into the gutter or the wall. And what a baby! A tall youth, six foot he would be, standing upright, half-reclining now with his shoulders against the back and his knees bent up; foreign-looking, Jajonek thought, and no nursery-child, with nearly a quarter-inch of hair all round his chin and across his upper lip. But an idiot—that was plain. The boy was staring straight in front of him and seemed to see nothing. His mouth was down at the corners, like that of a baby about to burst into tears, and his cheeks as white as a girl's at a pig-killing. Well, women went after that type, that was one of the queer things about them that no man could fathom. But how in all the world had the little whore got hold of him? He recognized the girl; she went up and down the street often, sometimes in company with one or other of the worthless youths, who seemed to be formed into some kind of gang, and who lived somewhere among the remote yards and alleys to which the passages at the end of the street gave access. A nice little slut, Jajonek had always thought; for his tastes, flamboyant in most directions, ran towards the frail and demure in women. Her choice of company was bad, in his opinion, for he considered that young girls should seek large men who smelt of horses, big blustering fellows who would slap them on the haunches and praise their pretty looks boldly, rather than the haggard, poetical sort. But there! a girl's man-whims were beyond all controlling, or else (he had to confess) he would never himself have lain in the bed of matrimony. And now she had found

another, the oddest of all, for her collection, and with a sprightly touch that he would never have thought of had got him in a perambulator, as if he were her own baby. He saw her as soon as she turned the corner and watched her coming towards him, treading lightly on the snow with her rather mincing steps, pale and determined, resolutely clutching the handles and jerking the front wheels up when they stuck, business-like, unaware that there was anything unusual in her progress; watched her with increasing mirth, which grew into loud laughter and then to jibes screamed hoarsely across the street.

"Ho ho! young woman! So you've got a little one now? Well, that was bound to happen! And a fine little chap he is, and there's no one who's a better judge of a child than Jajonek! Ho ho! let's see him smile. Make him put his tongue out! He was heavy in the bearing, I'll be bound! How long was the labour, Miss—three weeks? Come on now, make him laugh! Give him his bottle. . . ."

She glanced up at the toothless old villain, but took no further notice. And the boy, he seemed neither to see nor to hear anything. But for his open eyes and tip of his tongue passing back and forth between his lips he might have been a corpse. Jajonek screamed and roared with mirth, and shouted after them till they reached the end of the street.

When Max Krappel saw them from the window of the old piano factory he laughed as heartily as Jajonek had done; not as loudly, for when he laughed his tongue was against his upper teeth and his merriment came forth in breathy jerks, with a sound like a failing engine; but his face and body were convulsed with his mirth.

He called to Gustav Ott: "Quick! Come here! Look what Berta's found!"

But Gustav was not so amused. He muttered: "Little fool! It was food I sent her for," ran down the wooden stairs and across to the wicket in the sliding doors, and unlocked it.

"Come in!" he called, and she came, jerking the perambulator in front of her over the bottom strut. "And what in God's name have you got there?" he asked; fiercely but not furiously, for he was fond of the girl.

"His name's Klaus," she said. "He's starved. The soldiers flogged him."

"Well, we've no use for him here," Gustav said with finality. She looked up sharply, surprised.

"No use?"

"No!" And again: "No!"

"All right!"

She began to back out through the wicket, drawing the perambulator with her.

"Where are you going to put him?" Gustav asked, his mouth and eyes making the question one of casual curiosity.

"I don't know. I shall look after him somewhere. He can't look after himself. He looked like dead when they'd done with him."

She had got the back wheels over the strut and was pressing on the handles to lift up the front ones.

"He looks more or less like dead now," Gustav muttered. But added: "Stop a minute!" and called out: "Sigvard! here, I want you!"

The girl stopped, leaning on the handles, the front wheels of the perambulator cocked up.

"Better come inside!" Gustav said, leaning forward to glance up and down the passage. He called again: "Sigvard! hurry!"

With a gesture of slightly scornful acquiescence she pushed the perambulator inside again, and Gustav locked the door behind her. He stood staring at Klaus, his hunger-weakened eyes slow to focus in the light that came in dim patches through the dust-coated panes of the tall windows. Not dead, certainly, for the boy's eyes were open and his hands were moving; only sick and stupid. The face, as Gustav saw it, was not the face of a weakling, but rather a copy of those faces—he had seen them by hundreds, and they were united in his memory—of boys coming back from the outer zone, dazed automatons, without life as it should appear in human kind, without understanding; they came round, some of them, after a course of brandy, routine work, and girls; almost to normal sometimes; but his interest in the business had faded out long ago—single bodies meant nothing.

"What's wrong with you, son?" he asked, and he got a feeble reply. "Nothing wrong. My back hurts." A moment later: "I want something to eat."

There was a noise of deals breaking, and Sigvard Franken stumbled through the litter at the far end of the floor.

"What is it?" he asked. "I'm busy. Oh! the girl's back. Did she get anything?"

Gustav smiled. "Yes," he said grimly, "this! What do you think of it?"

Sigvard, glancing left and right as he did habitually, came up to the perambulator, stared for a moment, and picked up one of Klaus's hands as if it had been a geological specimen.

"Soft bred!" he pronounced.

Gustav shrugged his shoulders and sighed. "Always so anthropological, my dear Sigvard!" he said.

Sigvard stiffened. He never knew how much of insult there was in Gustav's little sarcasms.

"Well——?"

"He's hungry," Gustav explained. "That's why Berta brought him here. Seeing that this is a land flowing with milk and honey——"

"The soldiers flogged him," Berta interrupted.

By that word Sigvard was kindled into animation. He raised his head erect, his eyes glinted, his short beard seemed to stiffen and bristle. "Flogged? soldiers? My god! what for? Tell me why! Officers, I suppose! What right have the bastards?"

"We can go into that later on," Gustav said mildly. "The question for the moment is——"

"We'll keep him here!" Sigvard said decisively. "He'll serve as an emblem, a text. When they ask us 'Why did you crush out the bourgeoisie? Why did you cut rich men's throats?' this will be our answer. This boy, young, innocent, the scars across his back——"

Gustav broke in impatiently: "They'll be healed by that time—— nothing but thin red lines, if the boy happens not to be dead."

"You talk," said Sigvard, swinging round to face the new objective, "as if our plans lay in the remote future. I tell you that before the summer has passed——"

"Well, keep him, anyway," Gustav said, ignoring the rising tide of Sigvard's eloquence. "We may be able to make use of him."

It was returning (though he did not believe it), the love for his old hobby. You can pick up a man that's fallen to beasthood, start by administering little bodily comforts, treat the brain as you would a child's brain. . . .

"But as for Berta," he went on, talking loudly enough to break through Sigvard's spluttering voice, "I doubt if she's worth keeping. It's the third time she's come in without anything—not a crust or a bayonet or a pair of gloves, nothing. What she supposes we keep her for, when she mends clothes like a one-armed boxer and cooks like a purblind paralytic——!"

"With broken needles and Jak's home-made barbecues——" Berta protested.

"Brought nothing?" Sigvard echoed, suddenly descending. "No food? Nothing at all? She ought to be whipped."

"Oh, she will be, you needn't worry."

"And I'll do it," Sigvard said, again inspired. "Every man needs relaxation, and if I'm to keep going I must——"

"Discipline is my business," Gustav said shortly. "When I need your help I'll ask for it."

The streak of pure childishness which ran right across the grain of Sigvard's mentality showed again in a sudden petulance.

"Why shouldn't I have some of the pleasures? You always do what you want. You'd think we paid you to run this place. Look here, we'll draw chips for it"

Having pushed the perambulator to the foot of the stairs, Berta went up to find Max. He might be able to lay his hands on a bit of bread or something. So she was going to be whipped for her trouble! Well, Gustav had whipped her once or twice, and it hadn't hurt for long, and if Sigvard tried he'd find himself with a tooth missing. She shouted: "Max! where are you? Why didn't you come down?"

"But why?" Max asked again an hour later, "why in the name of reason did you go back? You might surely have learnt that much after all my training—never to try for a second haul in the same expedition. I don't know—it seems to me you don't learn anything."

He was unusually serious, upset perhaps because he had thought she was lost to him. Half an inch of ash hung precariously on the end of the cigarette he had stolen from Sigvard, and his toes boxed each other while he sat on the edge of a bench, his thin legs dangling. His fingers were stuck in the pockets of his grey woollen waistcoat, his narrow shoulders were curved forward, his head bent so that his eyes turned up to look at her as if he were peering over the top of spectacles. And beneath his racial nose, sheer bone bound against his face by the white skin stretched taut from ear to ear, his thin lips were pulled out as if held by a herring-bone.

"Why, when you had your pockets full already? God! I don't know! I don't understand you. If you'd got away they might never have known—there's bags of stuff there, they can't count it every day. And now that's closed for ever—they'll have had it all moved by this time, or else a line of soldier boys all round."

She was trying to interrupt him: "But listen, Max, you don't realize——"

"And what happens to us?" he persisted. "That shed was just made for us, there's no one else here who's not too fat and clumsy. That's what they keep us here for, that sort of thing. It'll take days to find anything like it, and we can't stop if we don't bring anything. Gustav keeps saying: 'Useless mouths! useless mouths!' every time I see him."

He had slipped down from the bench and was pacing the floor, talking as much to his twisting hands as to her. She had never seen him looking so upset.

"I don't think I want to stop here," she said. "I'm tired of all of them, specially Sigvard, he's so greasy and he's got such beastly eyes. I'm going away directly the boy's well."

"Boy!" he said sharply, "what boy?"

"The boy I brought back——"

"Oh him! How did he know about that shed? What was he doing there?"

"I suppose someone told him. I suppose a lot of people knew, only they hadn't the nerve to try it. He came the wrong way, of course, but he was coming up very well. I don't think he saw the sentry. I saw him crawling on the snow—you couldn't have done it much better. Only you would never have come up that front way—that was silly."

"Well, I wish you'd left him afterwards," Max said. "He's no good for anything now."

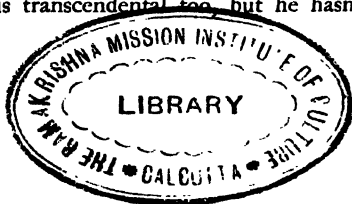
She was surprised at his callousness. "But I couldn't leave him," she said. "They'd have murdered him. They nearly did."

"Murdered? Nonsense! He's only suffering from shock. The scars aren't anything—didn't you see them? Besides, this isn't a hospital, or a refuge camp."

"But then, what exactly is it?" she asked. "An artists' club? You'd think so, if you heard Sigvard and Horstkötter talking sometimes. I've seen them gutting a rabbit together and talking about transcendental beauty or something like that for hours at a stretch."

Max smiled. Her swift relapse into the old gossip chatter had at once recalled his good humour. That, after all, was what he was here for, to look and laugh at the others; it was his life, and here, on poor rations, one lived it superlatively. That, again, was why he bore with Berta, when she fumbled the professional side of their partnership and was always inexplicably more ready to do what Gustav wanted than to do the same for him. The adroitness of her perceptions, untutored and unselfconscious, were to him the painting in rich, simple colours of the cartoons which rose one after the other in his mind and which he could never himself paint so well. He knew now, even acknowledged to himself, the cause of the sulky gloom which had covered him through the hours of her absence. Not pretty, as Gentile women went (for he preferred them Gentile), but as witty in her guileless way as he himself would have been had his thick tongue been quick enough vehicle for his racing intelligence.

"It is impossible," he said slowly, "when you are as dirty as Sigvard and if you smell like him, not to believe in everything transcendental. His New Revolution is transcendental too, but he hasn't quite realized that yet."



"And Horstkötter?" she asked, not in the least understanding him, "is he transcendental, or is it only his great flapping ears?"

He laughed aloud. "That's where it starts, with Horstkötter," he said. "Every time he looks at himself in the glass, which he can't do now, fortunately——"

At the top of the stairs Gustav's head and shoulders were appearing.

"Berta!" he shouted, "your fancy-boy's waking up. He's begun to talk, about his mother and things. Kudrnac doesn't know what to do—he's never seen anyone so balmy. If he's no better by to-morrow I'm going to have him shot. Here, Max! I don't know what you're doing, standing about making eyes at that slut. There's some cartridges you can fill in the lathe-room."

"And the fact is," he repeated, addressing Kudrnac, "that we're keeping him because the girl wants us to. And partly, perhaps, because we fancy that Max doesn't. That's not good enough reason to me."

Deprived of tobacco, he had a chip of mahogany between his teeth and was biting it savagely between every sentence. The wine that Horstkötter had brought in so triumphantly was too foul for him to drink, and even his nerves demanded a sedative of some sort.

"To destroy those who are both useless and unhappy has always been a rational principle," he added. "You, Kudrnac, will support me. And here, where law and convention are in abeyance——"

"For ever abolished!" Sigvard interrupted.

"——are in abeyance, we have a unique opportunity for putting rational principles into practice."

With another vicious snap of his teeth he had cut the chip into two pieces. He threw one away and began to gnaw the other.

"Any flaw in my reasoning?" he asked, with a tinge of sarcasm that was meant for Sigvard.

"None," Sigvard said.

But he knew that he would be caught out later on that pronouncement.

At the other end of the assembling-floor Horstkötter was still fumbling with his wires and pincers, constantly knocking over the candle-stump that he had stood on the bench beside him. It was his belief that he could make, from the odds and ends that littered the factory, a catapult of a new kind that would be almost as effective as a quick-firing rifle. His small, dark face still wore a little smile of triumph, not at the success of his present operations but at the memory of a fruitful raid he had made that day upon a house in the Hilders-

berger quarter. And since he was happy with his little victory and his ingenuous manipulations they left him there, forgetting in the absorption of their gossip even to laugh when his flat oaths, trickling feebly to their end, announced that he had put out his candle again, or cut his finger, or broken the piece of wood he had just got into position. An amusing little man, they felt, for all his superior manner to them and even to Sigvard, who claimed equal if not superior knowledge of the æsthetic verities; good-natured, a useful butt, and not a bad thief, though he always made for the easy quarries, houses where the fat bourgeois living behind drawn shutters managed somehow to get parcels from friends in Holland and elsewhere.

It was useful, too, to have a man near the door, for they were never free from the apprehension of sudden attack. That small pool of light made a limit to the long, dark extent of floor space, broken only by the queer outline of shafts and bands, benches and machinery pushed against the walls, a stray lath or cogwheel emphasizing the desolation. A little moonlight, reflected by the snow on neighbouring roofs, came in through the high windows, but its passage was so blocked by the dirt of months that it seemed itself to be dirty, brown with dust like the floor and benches on which it fell. Only the circle, ringed by the men who were talking and centred by the fire that Max had made for them in an improvised brazier, had the semblance of comfort to separate it from the dead vastness that lay between them and the lonely inventor. At their end the smell of the wood burning was strong enough to blot out the odour of staleness which filled the factory from cellar to roof; food gone bad, stale tobacco and stale fumes of spirits overriding the smell of carpentering that had faded as the sawn wood rotted and the planes became rusty. With the conquest of that nauseating odour they enjoyed a likeness of freedom, a turning towards days gone past, and in that warm light and that early-morning hour they could suffer their companionship without resentment or irritation, almost happily; forgetting, when their nostrils no longer told them, that their congregation was born of chance and that their fraternity had not even an articulated common cause to establish it.

It was Max, with his native genius for uncomely things that are useful, who had found the place, forced an entrance from the top of the fire staircase, and made himself the occupant with a fierce, strong youth called Schlunge as his sole companion; as it was he who had cleared away some of the rubbish, arranged small comforts, and fitted a pipe as smoke-vent for his brazier. And though Gustav directed him now, as he directed everything, it was still Max who did such domestic work as made their existence possible, while Berta sought

vainly in moments when the spirit moved her to make the possibility tolerable. So Max was blamed for the stink of the factory, and for any frame or trestle that Gustav or Kudrnac fell over, Max was cursed for the dirt on the windows and the rain that came in through the broken panes, and if Max was out foraging it was dilatoriness on his part not to get back sooner. He answered their oaths and threats with his cold smile, and if he had an insult ready with which to repay himself he would put the matter right at his leisure. He asked for no more than the privilege of insulting as he served them.

So: "Max!" Gustav ordered, by way of bringing the discussion to a practical level, "go down and see if that boy's awake now. Find out if he can walk—Kudrnac says there's no reason why he can't. And if he can, bring him up here." He waited till Max had gone, and then, turning to Kudrnac, added: "Supposing that you really know what you're talking about. We have no proof——"

From Sigvard or Horstkötter, Kudrnac would not have taken the taunt so lightly, unless it had been clothed with such smiles and disclaiming gestures as to make it almost obsequious. But Gustav—no, the fellow was not a gentleman, his personal habits would alone have betrayed him—Gustav had at least that knack for the cool assumption of authority that gave him almost a natural title to say what he pleased; only, of course, in these unusual and temporary circumstances, where there was tacit agreement to let the one man say "yes" and "no"—and where it was more suitable, Kudrnac argued, that that man should be nearer to the social level of the general body than he was himself. Besides, he thought (patching a web of reason which he faintly suspected was none too secure), the man had evidently been to some sort of university, and had served, so he said, as an officer; yes, he had even boasted of a club, though Kudrnac was doubtful. . . . So for a few seconds he was silent, only arching his eyebrows and peering with his faint blue eyes into the clouds of smoke that merged revolving into the darkness of the ceiling as if, far away in that obscurity, he alone could see Truth. His long, thin face was immobile, his lips squeezing each other inwards. Then, with the gesture he had never lost of removing a cigar and blowing out the smoke in a long stream, he said seriously, "And yet, my friend, if you were to inquire among certain noble families in Charlottenburg—in Hanover, Köln, Magdeburg—in any of the great houses all over the country——" He paused and puffed again at his imaginary cigar, as if he had forgotten, for the moment, what Gustav would learn by inquiring at those places; and continued irrelevantly: "The second son of Graf von Grossentahl was born with a crooked spine. It was not till his seventeenth year that I first met his uncle. I was travelling at that time in

California. The gentleman, being in the locality, had heard full details of the San Francisco case—Hubert Rockefeller's daughter. He cabled, and the Graf cabled back. His private yacht was offered——”

“We know,” Sigvard said impatiently, “that you have effected extraordinary surgical cures upon rich people, whose complaints, if I may say so, are frequently”——(he saw Kudrnac redden and chose a different word)——“of a kind demanding psychotherapeutic treatment, but the subject that claims our attention at the moment is that of a boy—not as far as we can judge an outstandingly well-born boy—who has been brutally flogged.”

His words were a challenge—as was most of his conversation, and he finished with his lips clapped together, beard thrust out, one eye holding Kudrnac on the outer edge of its field. It appeared that Kudrnac, now that this person had intervened, would say nothing further. He was muttering inaudibly: “Psychotherapeutic! Cock-nock ignoramus!” But his simple wish to display knowledge, whatever the risk, had the better of his intentions, and said presently:

“Nothing seriously wrong with the boy. Contusions. Flesh-wounds—hardly more than abrasions. Should be all right, at his age. Shock mostly. A better fed youngster would have suffered nothing more than a few hours' discomfort.”

“Now as to the shock,” Sigvard said precisely, assuming scientific interest, “is it—er—of a temporary nature? Supposing that in a few weeks' time we want him to give evidence before a People's Tribunal as to the nature of the assault, do you consider that there is a reasonable likelihood——”

He stopped short, startled by the sudden intrusion of Horstkötter, who had picked his way silently over the rotten boards, listening with all ears. “Do you consider——” he repeated, but Horstkötter, squatting beside him, interrupted: “I have seen the young man myself. His condition is peculiar and not without interest. You, Sigvard, noticed his hands, which, though roughened by recent hard usage, are plainly those of one who has been culturally nurtured. Hence we may suppose that within that mind, now shut off from us, there lie the rich seams of poetry, of music, of artistic expression. If we——”

“And since when,” Sigvard demanded, “has culture, in the real sense of that word, been the monopoly of the pampered classes? They indeed have opportunities for self-development that are denied to the proletariat, but if you go through the great masters of creation, Rabelais, Shakespeare, Giotto, Handel, Defoe, you find that——”

“But with regard to the boy Klaus——” Gustav suggested.

Horstkötter hesitated, his theories deflated by Sigvard's tempestuous incursion. "He is not whole in mind," he said.

Gustav spat out his chip and replaced it with another.

"We seem to be agreed upon that momentous conclusion," he said. "The next thing is, in fact the only thing is—do we keep him?"

"Or what?" Kudrnac inquired.

"Or shoot him?"

Kudrnac winced slightly. From the days of his small practice in Pilsen he had kept some things clear in his wrecked and drifting mind, among them that one does not kill one's patients, even when there is only an hour to go.

"It would provide a good test for my catapult," Horstkötter said thoughtfully. "We could go out between the two early-morning patrols, fix the boy up at one end of the Hauschenstrasse——"

"But I tell you that we must keep him," Sigvard growled, sulky at the thought of opposition. "It would be sheer waste to throw away such an emblem. Every great movement must centre about a single act or a single personality. In this boy we have demonstration, we have proof. There are those here in this town who in the deepest abysses of misery do not know who has oppressed them. The French, they think, the English. Truc, perhaps, but not the French peasants and the English factory-hands who for the security of a system which——"

"I entirely agree with you, Herr Franken," Kudrnac said, having learnt to know his man. "I entirely agree with you. My own philosophical views, as you know, are remote from yours. But I am at one with you in the necessity for——" he paused, twitched his fingers, and finding the vague word said: "Action."

Gustav, who had been sitting with his great shoulders hunched and his big square head sunk between them, his face the face of a schoolmaster who waits for silence, suddenly lifted his eyes to stare at Sigvard.

"Action," he said, "is that what you think, Sigvard, action?"

Sigvard nodded, but before his lips were ready for the welling torrent that Kudrnac had momentarily dammed, Gustav had burst out——

"Action! and yet you are the man who wants to add this boy to all our other useless wrecks, as if we hadn't enough of them—your guests mostly. If a woman comes whining round here, if you find a child in the street crying, you give her any bit of food you can lay hands on; if it's a man who's paralysed with V.D. so that he can't walk and can't think, you're the one who tells him to come in and join us, as

if we were a recreation society or an employment agency. Do you think that's the way your rich men organize themselves? Do you think you can ever do anything with a growing band of incompetents? You're drunk yourself whenever a bottle of spirits comes in and doesn't get handed over to me. And you consider that we here form a potential muster-point for the force that is to arise out of the prevailing misery and manifest itself in—action."

"I think," Horstkötter said mildly to break the silence that Gustav's storm had left behind it, "that none of us are wholly competent to appreciate our friend Sigvard's Marxism. We all, perhaps, differ in our understanding of the word 'action.' Action, in the Marxian sense, if I remember—"

"It's all very well, Gustav," Sigvard grumbled, "but you're too saturnine to conceive of action in any other sense but that of a battalion advancing in column of route. If you were left alone to run a revolution you'd first of all organize a share-company, with a full board of directors in evening dress. The essence of successful proletarian movement is spontaneity. You're too cautious—you think so hard of the best way to aim your rifle that by the time the sights are fixed the man's back is in the trench."

Gustav yawned openly. He found Sigvard's metaphors inappropriate and tiresome. He had heard them so often.

"But as to the boy?" Kudrnac asked.

Max went through the nearer door, letting in a gust of air to blow the smoke into Sigvard's eyes, and out on to the fire staircase. He closed the door and stood still for a moment. The iron balustrade had fallen away, but he stood at the very edge of the landing-stage quite fearlessly, with the canal thirty feet below him. It was a fine night, cold, the clouds high, the moon peeping between, every few seconds, at its reflection in the water. No noise but the constant dripping which showed that the thaw was still in progress, and a child's wail from somewhere in the clot of houses on the farther bank. He looked up and down the water, from the bend to the bridge that cut the extent to his left—always on the look-out for something that would be interesting or useful. Some object floated in the water just below him, a body, perhaps, or perhaps a chunk broken off from the rotting lighters that were moored higher up. He picked up a piece of rusty iron and threw it, aiming carefully. There was no hard sound, only the plop. A woman, he thought, but it was too dark to see. He went down carefully, avoiding the gaps where steps had fallen away.

On the floor beneath, the door was permanently stuck, but he entered through the sash window, and picked his way carefully across the loose boards. He knew the position of benches, machines and stacks so well, and had been this way so often, that he could pick his route in the dark without fumbling. But the men who chose to sleep on this floor had made their beds without regard to its use as a thoroughfare, and he stumbled against legs and shoulders at every few feet. Here and there a man sat up and cursed him. Something passed over his head and crashed against the wall at the end of the floor—someone had thrown a hammer. His leg was gripped now, in a huge bony fist, and a deep voice said: "Where are you walking, you bastard?" That was Schlunge. "Leave go!" Max said. "Why don't you put yourself to sleep under the benches? Why are you all in to-night? Is no one foraging?" The grip relaxed. "You'd better stay with your friend the boss, and Sigvard, if you don't want your throat cut. I was out last night." "All right! Good night, my little one!" He passed on, stepping carefully where Hasübert usually slept, but Hasübert was out. A light showed beneath the door of the foreman's office. He went inside.

Berta—yes, he had expected to find her; but not so amusingly engaged. The boy was lying on the floor, apparently in a deep sleep, his head supported on two folded sacks, his body covered with a blanket; and with a razor taken from Jak the girl, kneeling, was shaving him.

Max watched her for a moment.

"Are you cutting his throat?" he asked. "If so, you'd better let me. I'm more used to that sort of job."

She started when she heard him speak, for he had opened the door with his peculiar knock, quite silently.

"Oh, Max! I thought it was Fahrholz. I couldn't make the door lock."

"Of course not. It never has locked. The key's broken. Why do you want it locked?"

"I thought Fahrholz might come in."

"Well, why shouldn't he?"

"He might be drunk."

"Probably. He always finds the stuff somewhere. But he's more amusing when he's drunk."

"But he's not safe then. He went out this afternoon quite drunk and came back with a long loaf of white bread, all covered with blood. He couldn't get anyone to eat it except himself and Schlunge."

Max bent down and took the razor from her. "You're all so faddy," he said. "Fahrholz wouldn't hurt a fly, unless the fly had

something he wanted. Now if you'll just hold this fellow's head I'll make a nick in his jugular. It's the kindest thing."

"If you hurt him I'll kill you," she said seriously.

"Oh? And yet," he pondered, "he's not beautiful, as I understand beauty."

"You don't understand it," she retorted.

"No? But why were you shaving him?"

"He needed shaving. His face was filthy."

With a sharp movement she had taken the razor from him, cutting one of her fingers, and she set about to finish the work. The boy's sleep seemed to be undisturbed by the scratch of the razor on his cheeks.

"You're quite right," Max said, "there's nothing Gustav dislikes so much as untidiness. If he saw me with a button off my vest I'd be turned out immediately."

"I don't care what Gustav likes or doesn't like," she said over her shoulder.

"Oh? Has Gustav got a new mistress, then? You didn't tell me."

"I don't know what you mean about mistresses."

"No," he said, "no, it's a word grown-up people use."

Ignoring the insult, she reached for the bucket of water, drew it nearer, and plunged in the stocking which served her as a sponge. The shaving was finished, but the boy's face was still decorated with the blood from her finger, with pieces of hair and with the remains of the damp clay she had used for lathering. She squeezed the stocking and wiped the face carefully, but a little moisture trickled down the boy's neck and woke him. He opened his eyes and stared at her solemnly like a baby.

Max said: "Clumsy!"

The boy's eyes turned slowly and rested on Max. He asked:

"Is that you, Erich?"

"Well, at any rate he can talk," Max said cheerfully. "The next question is, can he get up? Can you get up, old lad?"

"You're not to worry him," Berta interposed. "He's not fit to get up."

But Klaus had already drawn up his knees and turned on one side. Slowly, and with grimaces of slight pain, he got to his feet and stood unsteadily, with an arm resting against the office desk.

"That's fine," Max said, "now, can you walk? Here, I'll give you an arm!"

"He oughtn't to get up," Berta objected again.

"Nonsense! He's been resting ever since you brought him, and asleep most of the time. Gustav wants to see him."

"Gustav can see him down here."

"He can't. He's enjoying himself gossiping with Kudrnac and Sigvard, and he won't move."

She could resist no further, and picking up the candle she opened the door. The weak light that she released groped out towards the end of the floor and showed dimly the forms of the men sleeping. Someone was awake and moving about—Fahrholz. He came forward, attracted like an insect when he saw the light, supporting himself against one of the long benches, blinking. "They're after me!" he shouted. "I can't sleep. They'll be here any minute." She shrank back into the office, leaving Max to face him, and Max, with Klaus on his arm, regarded Fahrholz calmly, noting, with his sharp eye for detail, the yellow of the man's eyes, the way that the iris faded into the cornea. With his free hand he took the candle and held it up to inspect him more carefully. "What's the matter with you, Fahrholz?" he demanded. "What are you wandering about for?" And Fahrholz, scared and uncomprehending, slunk back towards the sleepers; glanced round furtively, went a little farther, and sank down with his face on Steppuhn's stomach. "Come on, now," Max said.

They crossed to the door opposite; an odd trio: the Jew supporting a white-faced youth who was head and neck taller, the girl close behind them, holding the candle like an acolyte; rested half-way across the adjoining floor, and then picked their way to the wooden stairs, which they ascended slowly, Max panting under the weight of his companion. Berta went forward and opened the door.

It was Kudrnac who, hearing the click of the latch, rose and went to meet them. At the distance of a few feet he stopped and blinked at them stupidly.

"Is that the boy?" he asked. "God's mouth! I never thought he'd actually stir himself. How are you now, old fellow, better? Feeling hungry?" He took an arm, which Klaus gave him willingly, and lapsed at once from his professional to his social manner. "We're very glad that you've come to join us," he said confidentially, checking the pace of their advance. "We're a very happy band of brothers here, shipwrecked mariners, I might say, drawn from all walks of life but united by our common suffering. I'll tell you more about myself some other time—I never talk about my real self in company because I don't want to make the others uncomfortable—we're all just friends here."

Gustav stood up when they reached the circle, and approaching Klaus examined him carefully.

"Well, you can walk then!" he said. "Are you back in your senses, by any chance?"

Berta pushed herself forward.

"He oughtn't to have come up here, Gustav, he's too weak."

Gustav pushed her aside.

"Hold your tongue, Berta! Go away, I don't want you here!"

But Klaus was tottering.

"A chair, quick!" Kudrnac ordered.

Max was ready with a box, and Klaus was lowered on to it.

"He must have food," said Kudrnac, "he was asleep before I got enough into him."

Gustav shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose so, now we've started. Max, there's some oat-cake—you know where."

"What a big fellow it is!" Horstkötter said, stroking his chin with the knuckle of a forefinger, "I didn't realize he was so tall when I saw him lying down."

"And what do you think's wrong with you?" Gustav demanded.

"Wrong?" Sigvard broke in, "what's wrong? Take off his clothes and you'll soon see! I've been called a visionary, yes, by you, Kudrnac, but if anyone wants proof that my ideas——"

"You!" Gustav repeated, ignoring Sigvard and addressing Klaus. "What do you think's wrong with you?"

For a few seconds Klaus did not answer. He peered narrowly at Gustav, with the clouds drifting in quick succession behind his eyes. At length: "There is nothing wrong with me, Holy Father," he whispered. "I am hungry. . . . They said I was English. . . ."

Sigvard, with a glance at Gustav, gave vent to a peal of shrill laughter which was stopped by Kudrnac's hand clapped across his mouth. "Shut up, you damned fool!" Kudrnac hissed. "Haven't you the sense to see that a fellow in his condition——"

From the darkness at the end of the floor Max reappeared, with the food in his hand, and went towards Gustav. "Fahrholz is raising Cain downstairs," he observed at large, "they'll have him in the canal before daybreak."

"Good riddance!" said Horstkötter. "Here, young fellow, I should like a bit of that stuff. I haven't had——"

"Give it to me!" Gustav interposed sharply, but before it had reached his hand Horstkötter had leant forward and seized a fistful.

Gustav stood up.

"Hand that over, Horstkötter! Quickly!"

For a moment Horstkötter was defiant. With one arm outstretched to ward off attack he slid back the box on which he was sitting, and in another second he would have bolted. But Sigvard had him by the wrist, Kudrnac had leapt behind him, and Max, with his

long nails biting the skin, was forcibly opening his fingers. The lump of crumbling oat-cake fell on to the boards, whence Max picked it up and handed it to Gustav. The men resumed their places.

"I don't see why the boy should have it," Horstkötter mumbled.

"Here!" said Gustav, "here, Klaus—is that your name?—try this! Get some water, Max."

Klaus took the oat-cake and munched it slowly, his eyes roving from face to face, his body still and upright. He was all right, so long as no one asked him to walk. There was still a glow in the fire, and he wriggled forward a little to get nearer to it. Gustav, noting the movement, shifted to one side. "It's curious," Sigvard whispered to Berta, "how much trouble we take over your friend. You ought to be flattered, my dear." Finishing the first piece, Klaus looked up for more; a dog-like movement, and Gustav, breaking off a fresh piece, threw it to him as a man throws food to his dog. Klaus picked it up and went on munching. Only for one moment did he pause, to seek Berta's face. And when he saw her he faintly smiled.

Of her he was certain. The rest, creatures ranged in a circle to frame the present chamber, were for the moment harmless; he could be sure of no more than that, for from him the future was hidden, and the past dim, and if these men should turn upon him it would not be a climax that he might have avoided by the reckoning. They had given him food now, and before, as he remembered. And he was satisfied. There was a soreness across his back that sprang into a live flame at certain movements of his body, when the friction of the clothes ignited it. But the pain was a catharsis; the blows that he still felt, still counted, had paralysed, murdered, blotted out the monstrous images which had surrounded him before. They were not far away, the things that he had forgotten. A corner of his mind's vision was turned towards the road behind, and again and again he saw, for a moment entered, the dreaded territory behind the screen of smoke-clouds. Snow, stretching white and cold to the farthest horizon; and the tunnel, narrowing. But his back was turned against that region, and he was not so hungry now, and his strength was fast returning. Sometimes it seemed that his memory would grope in those forbidden places, as if it equipped itself with its own desire and its own strong power of willing. But he fought it then, held it back, would not give it rein. The present, the moment in which he stood, to act as instinct bade him and as his strength allowed, those were his desires and the limits of what his reason approved. At some time—the older self insisted—the sun might break the succeeding chambers of the present into a new, clean daylight. But that, too, was a mirage on which he would not allow his eyes to rest.

The voices came to him as though distantly, some of the words distinct, the meaning unsynthesized. It wanted only a little effort to understand what they were saying, but his mind shirked that effort; there was in his consciousness a fear that understanding would breed activity, that he could not allow so much union between his thought and theirs without the need to respond, to make the first step that would take him towards an existence more strange and complex than the one he now enjoyed. The effort must be made, the will would create itself and he would be launched on the running tide, would drift away from the harbour of intuition and simplicity which was his present refuge. But not yet. At present he was free, passive. Things came to him, objects, physical sensation. His body met the needs of the moment, shrinking from assault, stretching hands for food. Someone ordered and he obeyed. In living so dormantly he was free from responsibility, free from all fear save that which he felt the weight of as a child's weight in the womb is felt; present in consciousness always but, when it is still, forgotten; live but quiescent, waiting to reveal its form.

The food was finished. He must wait now until someone would give him more. He looked round again and saw as curious and interesting shapes the several faces, the big square face, the one with the beard, the long oval face of Kudrnac. And there, behind the others, next to Erich—Erich?—the girl was standing. He knew her name, it had somehow remained in the front of his memory—Berta. She had been with him, close to him, ever since—no! he would never venture back so far. He felt, as he watched her face, a warm emotion, a sensation richer and more intimate than the mere passing of images before eye and ear. That person was allied with him, had been his companion at his birth into this present disposition. She was dangerous, in that her presence might lead him back along the path of memory; but she was kind to him. And without his volition his lips had framed the word "Mutti."

"It's done him good!" Gustav observed. "We might get him round to normal if we kept him a few days."

"It would not be a bad plan," Max said softly, "to have someone normal in this place."

"My own opinion," Kudrnac began, "speaking from a considerable experience of——"

"But I should have thought," said Horstkötter, "considering the number we have here, half of them useless, compared with the amount of food——"

"But can we wait?" Sigvard objected. "You talk, Gustav, as if we were making plans that were to come into operation at the

beginning of the next century. We have waited too long. Within a stone's throw of this building people are starving."

"I am starving," Horstkötter said bluntly.

In Max, who had the streets in his memory, the streets which he explored and where they did not go, a sudden fury rose. Against Horstkötter first, but widening to embrace the whole group round him. Gustav, perhaps, could fit words of his own to the tune; he might be a saint, since he was only half a cynic—no one knew; but it had gone on too long, too long.

The boy had fallen against Kudrnac's body and was asleep already. Horstkötter's eyes were on him, curiously not without a glint of malice. Gustav had risen abruptly and stalked away; and the others would have moved, but that they lacked the spirit to quit such warmth as huddling gave them. The fire, unattended, had sunk to whispering ashes, and the smoke, gradually escaping through every outlet of the building, was giving larger and larger place to the foul smell which the kindling of the wood had routed. Discomfort had returned. With the night to shut out the gaunt and shabby outlines of the building, the fire to banish both stench and cold, they had enjoyed for an hour a new being; but it had crumbled and those moments would not come again. They must somehow sleep now, and awake to see the naked brick on every side, and find the strength of will to go out into the streets where not the patrols only would watch them at every corner and from guarded windows. Suspicions were crowding back; Horstkötter did nothing; Kudrnac had fallen to the easy living for which his class had bred him; and below, as Max reported, they were saying that in a company of friends four should not be so friendly as to gather, idle, round a fire. The next day would bring nothing new, only the bleak desolation that was too hard for comradeship; the idle benches, rotting boards, piled rubbish, bands hanging loose from the rusty shafts; outside, the straight, dim streets, still covered with the slush that the snow was leaving, the canal, stagnant, strewn with garbage. No palatable food, no letters, nothing changed.

Max's gaze wandered to Horstkötter, who had fallen into a doze. With the eyes closed his face was more likeable; elderly, dignified by the grey hair which had grown unchecked for many weeks and which hung, in thin locks slightly curling, almost to his eyebrows. Beneath the effects of privation Max could see a lingering delicacy, skin that had been cared for like a woman's, sensitive lips. At any rate, the man was more amusing, more subtle than Sigvard, he reflected. His eyes, shifting slowly, fell upon Klaus. The boy's mouth was open, and he looked ugly and foolish. Well, in the end they had not

decided what to do with him. They would have to keep him, he supposed, unless they tricked Berta, and that would not be easy. She had moved round and was squatting close to Klaus now, her eyes open, watching him. "They will never decide," he thought, "Gustav will never bring himself to that sort of decision." So the common fate would settle the matter, unless one of the lads down below took objection to the extra mouth and used his knife at a convenient moment; and that would not happen if Max could prevent it. Berta, after all, must have her whims, and his own share of her would never be anything besides companionship. He rose and slipped his arms behind Klaus's shoulders. "We must put him to sleep somewhere," he said, and raised the boy roughly, but without waking him. "You get hold of his legs!" One of the candles was out, and the second, which had burnt all down one side, was flickering feebly. Kudrnac, rising with a yawn, picked it up to light their way, and it went out instantly. They left him to hunt Sigvard's pockets for matches, and moved with heavy, cautious steps towards the door.

When the snow had all gone the sun's strength still increased, and on the top floor, which it reached through the intersecting roofs and chimneys that lay between the factory and the Handelstrasse, the heat was oppressive. Kudrnac, mounted on the benches, had scrubbed the lower panes to give the light free entrance. Light was cleansing, inspiring, he said; and Max had been too obstinate to do it for him.

Fahrholz's body still lay behind a pile of cases in a corner of the basement. No one troubled to move it, and Gustav (who perhaps foresaw that an object in the canal would drift, however slowly, into the region of police inquiries) had so far feigned forgetfulness of the matter. Kudrnac said that "the men" should have attended to the business of their own accord; he, at Gustav's direction, had privately taken a look at the thing and had wisely reported malnutrition as cause of death; though there were marks at the throat.

"It's not my job," Max said—and indeed, he was the busiest of them all. "Some of those fellows will shift it when it gets too much for their noses, which are none too sensitive." But for the most part the men to whom he referred were sufficiently engaged with their own affairs. Something was in the wind, and their association was now less casual, closer and more secret. Step-puhn, the huge Münchener with damp, bloodless face and bloodshot eyes, the rat-like Neuber, and Schlunge, Max's original partner, were for ever talking closely in a corner of the basement where they could not be overheard; and on the outskirts of the group Franz Simon, who

seldom stooped from his lean six feet to speak to anyone, would be hovering, half in their confidence, hearing more than they intended, more likely than they to make the first move. There were comings and goings, mostly after dark, more activity than there had been before; but their contribution to the supply of essentials had decreased, and it was only by the more frantic efforts of Jak and others that a daily meal of sorts was still found for everybody. Gustav cursed their laziness, but he could do nothing about the conspiracies and he pretended to ignore them. Sigvard, he knew, could have told him something—Sigvard and Franz were often seen together—but he was too much a politician to ask. He became more irritable, increasingly aloof and mysterious. He had lost grip; but he would still have things his own way in the end. His brains, he reflected with a little smile, were responsible for the three Maxims, taken with a quantity of ammunition on the road from Duisgen, and lying now (as only he and two others knew) under piles of sacks in one of the wood-lofts. When it came to the pinch. . . .

In the meantime the latest and foulest stench increased, and rose gradually through the successive floors. But it had not yet reached the top floor, where Kudrnac, pretending to be at work on the mechanism of a rifle, was enjoying the sunshine that his own efforts as much as the sun itself had created. Max disliked it; he preferred the gloom for its safety and its spiritual repose; the heat, he said, only increased every foul smell that hung in all the corners of the factory, the light threw into hideous relief the dirt and squalor and mounting rubbish that lay everywhere. So Kudrnac, whose pleasure was genuine, became yet more loquacious on the benefits he had rendered, expatiating upon Ritterian rays, upon epidemic reactions, psychological response and emotional consequences, until Max's irritation changed to simple boredom and indifference. Turning his back on Kudrnac, "You're slow, Klaus," he said, "I've finished seven and you're only on your fourth."

Berta, perched on the top of a piano-case, was stitching a shirt of Gustav's; a domestic touch which pleased Kudrnac—and the girl looked almost pretty, he thought, with the sun on her hair. He crossed the floor to join them, wondering vaguely whether Max was still her lover. "I must go out presently," he said, having no such intention, "we can't all be wasting our time on these little jobs. The larder's as low as it's ever been. The meat Schlunge got has gone bad—it can't be eaten."

Gustav was out, "to smell the air of the town" as he said. "As if," Max jeered, "one can't get one's lungs full by standing on top of the fire-staircase." And Sigvard had left shortly after Gustav;

also, it was understood, on an air-smelling rather than a useful expedition. For Sigvard things were going wrong in the town—behaviour was becoming more orderly, shops had opened, a good deal of barter-trade was in progress, men were returning to their own homes and families, there was talk of a new attempt to get one of the large factories going; conditions inimical to his own designs. There rose in Kudrnac, warmed by the sunshine, a sense of seniority which he always coveted and enjoyed seldom. He forgot that he was dressed in rags, that his face was not properly shaven, that his figure stooped now and that rich blood no longer flowed beneath the surface of his skin. Brushing away, with a sweep of his sleeve, a battalion of woodlice that was parading on the bench, he sprang lightly and sat down.

"You're sulky, Max," he said. "You've no right to be sulky. But young people always wallow in discontent and gloom—young Jews especially. I get lighter-hearted every day."

"And lighter-brained," Max murmured to his knuckles.

"And you," (Kudrnac had turned to Klaus) "I don't know what's wrong with you. We've given you more food than we can spare, you're as fit now as a Spartan, and you look like a soul damned in hell. Why don't you cheer up?"

Klaus raised his head slowly.

"I am satisfied," he said.

"Satisfied?" Max echoed, "what with?"

Klaus answered: "With the sunshine."

Kudrnac beamed on him. "The sunshine! Exactly! We—Klaus and I—we are philosophers. You remember what Diogenes said when Alexander wanted to share his tub? He said: 'It is better for you to be in the open.' You and I understand each other, Klaus. We enjoy simple things—we leave our friend Max to brood upon the morbid phantasmagoria of his own imagination."

"—and do all the stealing, and preparing the food, and cleaning the place up, and every other odd job that you're all too idle to tackle——"

But Max could hardly be angry with the preposterous creature, so radiant this afternoon, so benign and avuncular. The man sitting on the bench was hollow-checked and dirty, a skeleton with the grave clothes still hanging upon it, but in his manner—the suave smile, the cock of his thin eyebrows—Max could see what Sigvard and the rest could imagine only faintly, the elegant young doctor, the smart bridegroom, the bland and broad-humoured after-dinner speaker, the debonair officer, popular in the mess. . . . A come-down for the poor chap, this. But he was innocently happy. And how far down—they could only make guesses.

As if to answer his thoughts, Kudrnac had begun to embellish his stoicism. "I have seen life from every angle," he said, "I have been everywhere, I have moved in the highest circles of Europe. I have royal blood in my veins—I am closely related on one side to the Hapsburgs and on the other to the Romanoffs. If I were to tell you my real name you would not believe me." He faltered, and his eyes gazed wistfully at the farthest corner of the floor. "But that is all over," he said. "The Fatherland, which I have served faithfully, has betrayed me. I make no complaint. My friends and relations, who are scattered in Europe and America, would help me if I asked them for help. Throughout Germany there is not one great house still in the hands of its ancient owners that would not welcome me. If I disclosed my identity, this town, the whole country would be paralysed. But that is not my wish. I am content to take my lowly position in the service of Humanity."

Berta swept away the falling silence.

"If you will take off your trousers, Herr Kudrnac, I'll mend the hole in the rump for you."

"But how can humility serve the cause of Humanity?" Max asked, instinctively provocative, anxious to make the most of Kudrnac's present expansiveness.

Kudrnac was ready for him. "By patience and by giving an example," he answered; almost tersely, as if his words were full of meaning. "By cheerfulness, by responding with all my being to the lights and gaieties that creep into a troubled universe. And above all," he added, conscious of the slight downward and outward movement of Max's lips, "I serve Humanity by pouring out my whole store of experience, knowledge and intellectual power, not in the rôle of commander, but simply as a common soldier, fighting in the cause which we have united to promote. If I were to assume the leadership there would be jealousy and discontent. It would be said that an aristocrat, a born ruler, will never be content to take his place in the marching files. It would be said——"

Somehow he found himself on a broad road of reason; it had, he fancied, been waiting for him all along, but hitherto his mind had not found the means to delineate clearly the essential rightness of his position. He would have proceeded happily in that direction had he not been interrupted by the voice of Horstkötter, calling in shrill and childish tones from the floor below "Eureka!" A moment later Horstkötter's grey hair appeared at the top of the stairs, then his face, broken in an idiotic grin, and his skimpy body, dancing. He came hopping towards them, flushed and happy, with an odd-shaped object wrapped in an old silk nightgown under one arm.

"I have found it!" he cried, "I have found it! Not in vain have been my many wanderings."

His excitement infected Berta.

"Oh Horstkötter, what is it? A rifle?"

"No," said Max, "he's got two Maxims tied together in a bundle. Gustav will be very pleased."

He turned his back ostentatiously and went on working.

"Now look here, Horstkötter," Kudrnac said sharply, the radiance of the halo still warming his temples, "if that's food you've got it must be shared out properly. There must be no selfishness."

"If Horstkötter had found food," said Max, "he'd be so full he couldn't walk."

He had turned round, nevertheless, and was edging slowly so as to get the man between himself and Kudrnac. It might possibly be food—Horstkötter knew that he could not live here on sufferance for ever—and if it was, Horstkötter would not lightly sacrifice his claims to a finder's share.

Berta's eyes were fixed on the bundle.

"I know," she said, "it's a goose! A goose with a long neck."

As if united by telepathy Max and Kudrnac closed in together. Horstkötter, before he could move, found his arms pinioned.

"Fools!" he shrieked, "let go! You'll break the thing." But just as the bundle was dropping Berta darted forward and seized it. "Be careful!" Horstkötter yelled, struggling helplessly and red with anger. "Don't crush it! If you break it I'll slit your——!"

Delicately, enjoying Horstkötter's discomfiture, Berta unwound the nightgown and revealed a violin. From the last folds a bow fell on the floor.

The grip on his arms slackening, Horstkötter, with a sudden twist, wrenched himself free. He stooped, caught the violin in one hand, the bow in the other.

"And now, gentlemen," he said sourly, "if any of you can make use of this instrument you are welcome to share it between you."

He bowed to accept their unvoiced refusal and with an affected dignity marched a way to the farther end of the floor. There he sat down on a pile of sacks and began to pluck the strings brutally, filling the air with wailing discords.

"For God's sake, stop!" Kudrnac shouted.

"Play something!" Berta called, "give us a tune, Horstkötter!"

But he would have enjoyed his sulks to the finish, despite the itch of his fingers, had not his sharp ears caught Max's voice:

"He can't, you fool! You surely don't believe what he's always saying about the Wiesbaden Orchestra. He doesn't know which end to hold the thing."

Horstkötter stood up. "No? I do not know which end to hold the violin? I have never played?" He took hold of the scroll and swung the body to his collar-bone.

"And now," he said, advancing, "when I have played a little you, Max, shall teach me the proper way."

He drew the bow sharply across the strings, turned one of the tuning pegs and began to play.

"We have so little to do to keep ourselves alive," Max said, working steadily, "that we can spare the time to play our violins."

But his ears were pricked. For in all the long months since he had left his home in Morchstadt he had heard no music; nothing but a flute played in a beershop, the tin whistle of a man in one of the groups of soldiers struggling eastward along the roads, and a cracked record on a cottage gramophone in the house of Frau Goldstein, where he had passed a night on the way to Gert. And he was fond of music. Among his earliest memories was that of his father, a little old man with a forked beard, a native of Warsaw, playing the melodies of Strauss upon a violoncello that could have been sold (his father was never tired of saying) for enough to buy up the whole tenement building, and half the street besides. He had never played himself, had preferred to follow his father on the business side, where the intercourse of bargaining gave him what he most sought after, variety, movement, the mosaic of human relationships. And yet the tunes were always in his head, now that he had forgotten Isaac Küster's stories, and the gossip of the market, and—almost—the taste of Kosher. He longed now to hear those tunes again, and would have bribed Horstkötter to play them—there were three biscuits that he could lay his hands upon, preserved for Berta—had the temper of the situation allowed.

As it was, Horstkötter was playing, to his ear, gloriously; something Max recognized faintly, Brahms, he thought, perhaps one of the Hungarian dances; fast, bright-coloured and emotive. The fingering was imperfect; Horstkötter's playing-fingers must be stiff from rheumatism or from lack of practice; but that Horstkötter was a musician, that music was nearer his inner being than any of the senile vanities and vulgar appetites that flavoured his person and manners, was not to be disputed. He was rapt in his playing, his arm moved easily, there was grace in the bend of his wrist, passion in his eyes and his closed lips. The notes danced and shouted, grew louder and higher and faster and more insistent to keep above

the undercurrent of low-pitched melody that rose and swelled and sank back and rose again with a higher and fiercer clamour. But the player was master of his creation, the harmony was unbroken, the quivering multitude of sounds were ordered in their chords and phrases; there was no licence, no exaggeration, only a tide that advanced tumultuously between restraining walls, a heterogeneity patterned and ordered as a mob that battles upon a theatre stage. Involuntarily Max stopped working, and while his fingers tapped upon the bench his head nodded slightly, his ears tense in nervous appreciation. Klaus, with his eyes fixed on the player, his mouth open, was beating the rhythm with the blade of his knife on the floor.

Kudrnac, boyishly pleased with the noise and novelty, had started to dance. Shuffling back to the bench he picked up Berta, set her upon the floor, and holding her by the hands led her off in a barbarous polka, breaking his step at every pace to kick aside the sawdust and splinters. Max watched them sardonically. Horstkötter appeared not to notice, and when he stopped playing Berta shouted: "Go on! again! again!"

"You like it?" Max whispered to Klaus.

He nodded. "My mother used to play it."

"Your mother! Is she dead?"

"I don't know. I think so."

Horstkötter had started again in a slower tempo, more martial and heroic. Kudrnac paraded ridiculously, now with one arm round Berta's waist. She responded to him, and with knees jerked high they marched the length of the floor, turned like soldiers, clasped again, and marched back, with such a spirit and bravado that Klaus clapped his hands in applause. And Horstkötter himself, marching in the line that crossed theirs, was holding his body erect, his shoulders squared. The tune was simple, a child's piece to a player of his virtuosity, but his spirit flowed into that easy channel. Max, watching the swagger in his stride, the light in his fierce little eyes, found in himself a passing sympathy. It was what they wanted. The broad air with its warlike flavour set their hearts marching to its rhythm; their response was a proud response, and it was pride they hungered for in their drab existence, with no good prospect but that of some slight relief to the belly. Kudrnac, for all his pretence of buffoonery, had caught in his stamping feet the fever that Horstkötter was loosing with the rhythmic motions of his bow. Berta, if she felt no awakening of bellicose ambition, was in tune with him, her feet stamping with his, her body braced as his was. And Klaus had risen so that he could stamp his feet in time with theirs.

It was Klaus whom Max watched intently. He had turned his eyes from the mincing trio—fools! he thought, to be fiddling and dancing; though his fingers marched on the bench to the measure of their marching feet—and was at work once more, with his lips fixed in the scornful smile. But with his back half-turned to the others he could look at Klaus, and Klaus, with his shifting eyes on the figure of the player, would not return his gaze. A sounding-board, Max thought, a mirror reflecting unconsciously the light of primitive emotions. The boy had progressed, since Berta had brought him, just so far: that he responded now to more complex stimuli, that he could imitate more exactly, that the range of his sensual perceptions was wider. He had grown in those few days through the first years of infancy, to become a being that was not only sentient but intuitively active. He might grow further, or he might remain as little Posselt down below, with a fair, sparse moustache to honour thirty-six years and a mind incapable, however trained or coerced, of counting to twenty or spelling out a word of one syllable. But no, the cases could not be parallel. For Posselt had just stopped short; a dog had bitten him, perhaps, or a carriage had knocked him down, or a foolish boy had jumped at him in the dark. The tall youth who gazed open-mouthed at Horstkötter, stamping, had met the arresting blow at a later date. Recently, Max believed; but he could not be certain. Kudrnac would know, if he were not the prince of liars; Gustav said about two years—"An obvious shell case, Max; not unlike Kudrnac's. Yes, they would have drafted him under a false age. I saw still younger . . ."; but Max had disagreed—Gustav's intelligence was sound on the whole but coarse, typically Gentile. At any rate it was there, the essence of mature or maturing humanity, somewhere behind the mask of fear and stupidity; and at this moment—Max felt a cold tingle of excitement added to the pleasures of objective scrutiny—a ray from the hidden candle seemed surely to be shining dimly in the intent, dark eyes.

"You're enjoying this, Klaus?" he asked softly.

"Yes, yes! I enjoy it. Oh, I enjoy it."

"The sort of music you like?"

"Yes."

Klaus's eyes were still on Horstkötter, but he turned them suddenly and spoke to Max directly; his voice low, touched by passion.

"It makes me want to fight."

Max smiled faintly and raised his eyebrows.

"To fight! Who? Not me, I hope. You're too tall for me."

"No. No, I know now that you are not Erich."

Erich? Why was that name always on his lips?

"Who then?" Max repeated. "Who do you want to fight?"

Klaus hesitated. He did not seem to know. But he said at last, uncertainly: "The English."

That, perhaps, supported Gustav's theory. There had been a mountain of opposition, at home if not at the recruiting office. The end had been achieved, but in his long dream the boy must wage that battle again and again. And yet Max was doubtful.

He asked: "Why?"

And the answer, to his surprise, came at once:

"They killed my parents."

Berta and Kudrnac were perfectly in step now. They had lost all self-consciousness and were marching, marching, backwards and forwards, turning with three steps and a kick at the end of the beat, heads up, eyes forward, harnessed to Horstkötter's darting bow. "Ballet-puppets!" Max whispered. The music quickened and the column that Horstkötter had made to tramp along the high road mounted to the hillside, where the soldiers became light as fairies and skipped and danced in the sunshine. His long, nervous fingers leapt upon the strings, his wrist, growing suppler with every movement he made, arched and furrowed like the neck of a swan, his eyes had a glint of mischief, and with the air recurring and recurring he let the music run higher and lower, now throbbing, now rippling, twisted it to show a different aspect, caught it, gave it liberty, drew it back. The moment would come, they knew it was coming, waited for it. The music rose, dropped, ascended by stages to the topmost peak of gaiety; a pause; and the march came once more, the column was back on the hard road. The tune was seized again by its stamping rhythm. Horstkötter's shoulders squared, his arm moved like the arms of a battalion on parade, incisively, regular; his head was up, his eyes glistening; and like an army changed into the shape of harlequin, Kudrnac and Berta marched, turned, marched back, defiantly stamping, while Klaus, still leaning against the bench, his body aquiver and his eyes ablaze, crashed heels and toes on the floor to swell the echoing thunder.

Until Neuber, white-faced and dishevelled, arrived suddenly at the top of the stairs and shouted: "Herr Kudrnac! Horstkötter! Come, quick! There are four soldiers outside."

His sharp voice penetrated the *alla marcia* like a sabre, and as the music collapsed into silence Kudrnac came to a standstill.

Horstkötter, raging at the interruption, shouted: "What is it? curse you! What are you talking about? Soldiers! Where?"

He ran to the end of the floor, swearing as he stumbled over deals and trestles, scrambled on to a bench, seized a hacksaw and broke two panes of the window. With his head squeezed between the frames he called: "Oh, there you are! What are you doing here? What do you want?"

The reply was inaudible to those behind him. Kudrnac seized the rifle that he had left on the bench and ran to the window, slipping a cartridge into the open breech as he went. He jumped up beside Horstkötter and broke another pane with the rifle's butt.

"Be careful, you!" Max warned them, standing close behind. "It's not time to start a row. Gustav will——"

"What do you want?" Horstkötter roared again. "We don't want soldiers round here. Go and tell that to the Kaiser or whoever you belong to!"

Berta, at Max's elbow, was begging: "Let me get up, Max. I want to see. What's wrong with Horstkötter? He's drunk, isn't he?"

"Of course he's drunk!" Max hissed. A few feet away Klaus, pale and feverish with excitement, watched them.

"Have a shot at them!" he reiterated. "Try a shot at them!"

From the road below the soldiers were shouting something. Max caught the words "demand entry . . . peaceful search."

"Be careful!" he repeated. "Come down, Horstkötter! Let Kudrnac talk to them!"

But Kudrnac was hardly less excited than his companion. His feet were stamping again, shaking the bench, and he was bawling words to Horstkötter's tune.

*We're up, we're up, we're marching,
We're alive in the light of the day,
We're the lords of creation, the hope of the nation. . . .*

Horstkötter withdrew his head. The side of his face and one of his ears were bleeding, cut by the ragged edges of the glass. "Damned insolence!" he growled. "They can't talk to us like that! Damned swine! Here, give me that!"

He seized the rifle and thrust the barrel through the window. Max caught hold of his leg and tugged. "Leave go!" he screamed, and with a backward kick which caught him under the chin sent Max flying into Klaus's arms. He jerked in the bolt.

Kudrnac stopped singing.

"One minute, friend. . . ."

The rifle went off. There was a cry below.

Berta gasped.

"Did you get them?" Klaus asked.

At last the telephone line to Duisgen had been repaired. The reason for the delay was obscure to Lagenpusch, who had no knowledge of such technical matters and grew only more irritable when they were explained to him. The technical fellows could always spin out their excuses, wrapped up in a meaningless phraseology, till the cows came home. Still, it was done now, and that was something to be thankful for, though he had no intention of saying "thank you" to anyone. At last he could get to grips with Kupferschmied, who in correspondence was the most skilled artist in evasion in the German army, and as soon as he had got a few straight answers to straight questions the whole position would be much easier.

"Yes," he repeated to the mechanic, "that is all right. Yes, you have the line complete. Yes, you needn't tell me again. Probably you can find some other work now." He rang off impatiently, paused for a second, and raised the telephone again. "Get me Herr Brigadegeneral Kupferschmied at Duisgen!" He waited for five minutes before the bell rang, and then a distant voice demanded: "Is it you who are asking for Poswikhafen? What do you say? I can't hear you! Duisgen? The barracks? Yes, I will call you." But half an hour had passed when the bell rang again, and another ten minutes—while Lagenpusch cursed, struck the contact repeatedly, pulled at his chin, cut notches with his penknife in the edge of the table, gritted his teeth, roared: "Allo! Allo! Allo!"—before a faint voice said: "Duisgen, yes! The barracks? Yes, I am putting you through." Then a dull, heavy voice: "Barracks! Yes, sir, I'll connect the line!" Then: "Leutnant Wolff here! Who is speaking?"

Wolff? Yes, Lagenpusch remembered the young man, disliked him.

"Connect me with Herr Brigadegeneral Kupferschmied!" he said curtly.

"I'm sorry, that's impossible," was the reply.

"It is Herr Kolonel Lagenpusch speaking. I have to speak to the General on a matter of the highest importance.—Are you there? Are you there? Do you hear me?—A matter of the highest importance. I can hardly believe—don't interrupt me!—I can hardly believe—what's that? Gone? Gone where? What do you mean? where's he gone?"

Leutnant Wolff, whose telephone manner was easy and polished, said in silky tones: "Where! Well, it's difficult to say, sir. The general feeling is that the less inquiry made into the Brigadegeneral's present whereabouts—and—shall we say—immediate occupations —,"

"Who is at present in command?" Lagenpusch demanded sharply.

The lieutenant's manner infuriated him. The man's conversation reeked of indiscipline. A sign of the times! That kind of thing was everywhere, it was creeping into the inner sanctuaries, it was infecting the very priesthood of German order and efficiency. But the hint of a scandal about Kupferschmied was not without savour. He would follow that up through other channels.

"What do you say? I didn't catch the name. Ochlost! Well, present my compliments and say I wish—ask if he can speak to me at once, please."

Wolff made a little deprecating noise, which the wire carried perfectly. "I'll go and see, sir," he said. "The Herr General rather likes two glasses just at this time, sir, but if I can——"

"Hurry!" barked Lagenpusch.

Presently, but not before Lagenpusch had widened and deepened one of the notches in the table-edge, a gentle, rather sleepy voice asked: "Are you there? Herr Kolonel Lagenpusch, I believe? Ah yes, ah yes. Oh, thank you, Herr Kolonel! No, not permanently, I am just holding the post until someone else is drafted. Yes, I have the files before me—I've been through the more recent correspondence already."

With some difficulty Lagenpusch waded from the shallows of compliment and formality into the deeper waters of his business. Had he been speaking to Kupferschmied he would have moved easily along the prepared route. This man was a stranger to him, and there were all kinds of generals, particularly since the war, when pushing and spectacular young men, often of unknown family, had achieved high positions, leaving officers like himself, men who had been properly broken to arms and who knew the Manuals from A to Z, to retain second place. Ochlost? The name was but vaguely familiar—nowadays you could never tell who anyone was or where he came from. He sounded like a gentleman, that was something, but there was a disquieting lack of precision in his answers, no force, no sharpness, nothing of that crisp authoritative finality which Lagenpusch used himself and expected from his seniors. A series of "Yes? . . . yes! . . . yes?" patient but rather bored, slightly paternal, agreement that sounded insincere, the strategy of one who sees possible conflict ahead and who takes the easiest way. Yet

the conversation was proceeding not unsatisfactorily; Ochlost could hardly admit so much and grant nothing; indeed, he was already beginning to make offers. "Officers?" he murmured, and his voice faded, and Lagenpusch suspected that he had put his hand over the mouthpiece while he asked a question. Then: "Officers I'm afraid are rather rare. The question of salaries, you know, and a certain disinclination for military service brought on by the overdose that our best youngsters have had in the last few years. Curious, yes, curious when so many are idle. Local, perhaps. It's hard to say. But N.C.O.'s, yes, I may be able to spare you one or two N.C.O.'s. And if you want men I think I could let you have a few. Things are quiet here, oh yes, very quiet. And our arrangements enable us to make the best use of what we've got—the credit is entirely my predecessor's, of course. Of course Duisgen's a large place, you will realize that—what? can't you hear me?—I was saying that Duisgen's a large place, and we can only keep things in order by constant surveillance. The police can't be left to themselves: it's essential to have a fairly large body here—the capabilities of the policeman are limited to controlling traffic and chasing pickpockets. Don't you agree, Herr Kolonel? Still, I think I can spare you a few. When? Well, I can't say exactly when, but shortly. I will see that a note is made at once. My time? Nonsense, nonsense, my dear Kolonel. It has been a pleasure to have this conversation with you. I hope we shall meet some time. Yes, I am busy, of course. I often long for the old days when I was a colonel like yourself, there was time for Bridge then, and ladies. Yes, things are very much altered. It is hard to know from day to day whether one is still a soldier or only a performer in a very elaborate stage drama. Well, we must be philosophers, must we not? Yes, I have made a note that you would like some more men. And N.C.O.'s? Yes, I will see if I can spare you one or two N.C.O.'s—we are rather short here. Beer and tobacco and food and N.C.O.'s are the things we're most short of, ha ha! and officers, yes, they are scarcely obtainable, ha ha!"

Whether to be pleased with the concession or furious with the General's nonchalance, whether to thank him profusely or to push the case further—Lagenpusch, now actually stammering, could not decide. He said again, with all his thoughts trying to scramble together through the narrow channel of speech, "I do assure you, Herr General, that any help you can give me will be much appreciated. My losses from desertion and other causes have been severe, as you know. My task here is not an easy one, though I have never looked for easy tasks, indeed I——"

He stopped, suddenly aware that Ochlost was speaking again, in his low, easy tones. "Yes, you have no need to tell me, Herr Kolonel, I am only too well aware, yes, I'm afraid we are all too much aware of what is going on in Birnewald. Really it has made us wonder—I was going to say, conditions in Birnewald are almost a European scandal, and it isn't so easy for any town to be a distinctive scandal these days. Yes, it is constantly the subject of talk in Berlin—I was there a week ago. I really feel that you should—how shall I put it?—exert a certain firmness. You know, of course, as well as I do, that you cannot land a shark with a spoon-bait. I beg your pardon? Ah, perhaps you are not a fishing man. That reminds me, I was going to ask you whether you wished to be relieved. We all realize that your post in Birnewald is not an ordinary one, and special conditions should be made to apply. What was that? What did you say? Ah well, I'm very glad to hear that. But I think you ought to bear in mind the importance of a vigorous policy—a—how shall I express it?—a policy of—of vigour. We must not be content with the *status quo*. I feel that Birnewald is beginning to forget that some sort of law still exists in this country, and for that reason it will be so much harder for him when we send someone to make a final drive and clear out all the unsatisfactory elements. I am sure you will realize what I mean. Your legal position? Oh, but I'm sure there need be no difficulty about that, Herr Kolonel. It is your duty to maintain order, and we leave it to you to take the necessary steps. It is hardly necessary, I'm sure, for me to give you more detailed orders. Indeed no! No one can possibly blame you if—how shall we put it?—if accidents occur. The country is very much over populated at the present time, over populated, that is, with persons of the wrong kind. Yes, I feel that the time has come when you should try the effect of gunpowder. Insecticides and—er—parade-ground manoeuvres are not really sufficient to meet the case. Yes, I can assure you that no awkward questions will be asked. . . ."

For some time after the voice had dwindled away Lagenpusch, conscious despite the storm in his mind of his duty as a subordinate, held the telephone to his ear. His face was crimson, his lower lip held by his teeth like a rabbit in a steel trap. At length, when he was certain that the General had rung off, he put the telephone down.

It was only then that he became aware of Grubner, who was standing silently by the door.

"What is it?" he snapped.

"The party you instructed me to send, sir, to that old factory——"

"Yes, yes! What——?"

"It's just returned, sir, with one man killed. It was deliberate, sir, and they saw the man firing. The corporal says——"

"I don't care what the corporal says——!"

As yet there was no sign of the mist lifting, but a breath of wind, colder than the dark surrounding air, was enough to wake old Jajonek, who lay near the window and never slept deeply. Mumbling in the dream that still hung about him, that followed him impishly through his sleeping and waking moments, he dropped his feet to the floor, pulled a blanket over his shoulders and went to the window.

"Are they all in bed?" he muttered. "They don't get up nowadays, they lie in bed till mid-morning like lords and ladies."

By the clock in the Bismarckplatz it should have been light enough to see to the end of the street, but cloaked by the ground-mist high rain clouds had gathered overhead, and already a light drizzle had begun, as if the mist were melting into dampness against the houses. The air was very stale. Looking across the Tegnergarten, dwellers in Gertrudenhof could see a patch of sickly yellow in the haze and knew that the sun was close on the horizon. But it was chilled and stifled by the fog, and a light cloud passing between the distant trees was enough to blot out the frail sign of its approach. A man standing beside a motor-car in the Weinmeisterstrasse said softly: "It's no morning for the job," and the reply was: "He won't let us wait. We might leave it another twenty minutes." Jajonek, a hundred yards from the voices, heard nothing, though his ears were sharp enough. He smelt the air and coughed. It was no morning to be about so early—if he tried to get downstairs Klara would wake and stop him from going out—but he was restless, and if he lay down again he would only be carried back into a world as vividly sensible as this and more perplexing in its shifty behaviour. He could not be sure what the time was; it did not feel like dawn, and he thought that perhaps he had slept all through a day to wake again in a chilly evening. The silence, emphasized by the little noises—the gentle trickle from a broken gutter, a dog barking two streets away—disquieted him; for he had lived boisterously, and in his evening he wanted no stillness. The cold mist made little drops on his face, and the smell of the air, damp and stagnant, troubled his nostrils, which were used enough to foul odours but would not tolerate the vapour of a moist sunrise imposed upon the common smell of a dirty street. He looked every way, puzzled, thought for

a moment that he was still asleep, and then, coughing again, saw his saliva falling to the street below.

Now, surely, the mist was growing a little thinner, the drizzle of rain increasing. And as if in answer to his wish for human sign and movement the tramp of feet sounded at the street corner. Craning his head as far as he could he saw dim shapes moving towards him, and as the sound of marching feet increased he could discern a file of men passing below the window, extended, each man two paces ahead of his fellow, a dozen in all. They seemed to march softly, checking the force of their steps against the pavestones. There was no murmur between them, no word of command. They moved on, like ghosts in the grey light, and at the end of the street they halted.

Jajonek was aware that the sound of their steps had ceased. He peered after them, but could not distinguish their shapes, motionless now, from the dark patches on the brick and rubble of the houses. He began to doubt if they had passed at all.

Coughing, he waited for another manifestation. A window in the house on the other side of the street was thrown up. A little way up the road a door opened, a man peeped out, and then moved cautiously away, disappearing down the intersecting alley.

From where he stood, against the high parapet of the roof of the Café Zum Wiener, Beuloh could see over the squat cottage which lay between him and the canal, and when the mist rose he would have a good view of one wall of the factory; if it did rise; and Beuloh was not so certain that the affair would not develop into a game of hide-and-seek, where, in the deluding semi-darkness, the hiders would play and win in their own way. Lagenpusch had been mad to insist on the assault directly he had a few more pawns to handle, regardless of the weather. Much better to wait a few days more and allow the sense of security—scattered, no doubt, by the Klatte affair—to be re-established. Had Lagenpusch inspected the neighbourhood himself, had he any precise idea as to the spider's web of alleys, the front and back doors of cottages, the convenient windows that made up the ants' nest on three sides of the factory? Well, if the mist only cleared the job might be over in half an hour, and they could get back and have the remains of last night's coffee heated up; with luck the first morning patrol would be cancelled; but it was going to be damned wet and cold, one way or the other. Perhaps, if the mist grew no thinner, Lagenpusch would have the sense to call the show off. But that would be unlike him—no strategist, Lagenpusch, nothing but a glorified bayoneteer.

He took a pace back and stood for a moment with his feet against the sloping tiles; then climbed down through the dormer window into the attic room. The woman who had been sitting on the edge of the bed in her nightclothes, shivering, rose and stood close behind him. He asked, over his shoulder: "Has one of my men been up?" "No!" she said, "no!" Then: "There won't be any firing, will there, sir?" He answered absently, "There may be, a little. Not in this direction."

With his eyes half-closed he was trying to visualize more clearly the whole position, wondering if he had left an exit unguarded. The woman spoke again. "You won't let the soldiers go into the room below this, will you, sir? I've got two children asleep in there; the little girl's ill." Her voice, watery and indistinct, irritated him. "I don't expect I'll need to use that room," he said.

Heavy footsteps sounded on the wooden stairs and a man, entering unceremoniously, saluted. "From Leutnant Markfort, sir. His men are posted. His own post is close to the bridge."

"Good!" said Beuloh, "that's all right. Oh, corporal, on your way back you'd better speak to those men in the garage. How many are there there? Three? Yes, that'll be enough. Tell them—in case it hasn't penetrated their thick skulls—that they've to keep themselves as inconspicuous as possible; but not to let anyone pass, either way. No indiscriminate firing, but they're to plug anyone who's obstinate. See that they've got hold of that. And they can whistle if they want assistance. I'll be down to see them myself presently."

Dismissing the messenger, he went out again to the roof. It was a little clearer, he thought, but not much. He could just distinguish the factory windows now, and a lighter some way along on the farther bank of the canal, which had been invisible before, showed clearly. A high chimney shut off the sector where the bridge would be, but on the panorama which he saw in part and imagined as a whole he could place it exactly. There was plenty for Markfort to cover, the canal itself and the narrow twisting street which separated the houses adjacent to the factory from the warren beyond; but the boy knew his job, he would make the best use of the men at his disposal.

No movement reported yet from the ground outside the cordon. That was satisfactory. "We are using dynamite to unshell an oyster," he had said to Markfort, but if turbulent spirits made a counter-attraction behind the men's backs the metaphor might have to be altered. "Bows and arrows against a battleship" would be nearer the mark then. Still, it was unlikely. All the cut-throats in the

world might be creviced in that borderless tumour of mean houses, but a battalion of cut-throats did not make up a fighting battalion. The soldier in Beuloh was rising. He was conscious of a faint excitement, almost a subtle pleasure, in spite of his empty stomach, his heavy eyes, and the raindrops running down his neck. A whiff of the old days. War—no, he could hardly call it war, when the affair amounted to nothing more serious or more likely to yield variety than a badger-digging; but it was an event of sorts, and after so many days of duty as a half-pay policeman the illusion of action, the cold, still sense of waiting for the sound of the first shot, was worth tasting with a cupped tongue. He experienced again the busy-ness of preparation, the need of secrecy and concealment, the faint uncertainty which, felt so often, served only to point the positive value of mere existence; and he could almost hope that the encounter would not collapse, as he half-expected, into the fiasco of a tame surrender.

He glanced at his watch. Only ten minutes to the time, but visibility was still not more than a hundred yards or so and if Lagenpusch had any sense he would wait a bit longer; it was not like fighting in the open, over well-mapped ground. He went inside again, and passing through the room said: "Why do you sit shivering there, Aunt Maria? Get into bed again, why don't you? If you're trying to tempt me, I'm too busy." Stumping down the narrow stairs he thought vaguely: "What can her husband be doing?" Outside he quickened his pace; he was anxious to be back on the roof when the fun began, since from that position he would learn at once, with his cultivated powers of observation, how things were going. When he reached the garage he found that the men were concealed, standing in a line a foot from the threshold, chatting unexcitedly in low tones; but the barrel of a rifle protruded a foot beyond the line of the adjacent wall.

"I suppose you imagine," Beuloh said, as he joined them, "that there is one man, woman or child in Birnewald who doesn't know your position? If you want to be quite sure of evading continuous observation you might pile your arms in the middle of the road."

Automatically he stooped to adjust a belt that had slipped off the jacket-hook. "If you feel like going to sleep or going home to your mothers or anything you won't hesitate, will you? I'm not sure that it would make any difference," he added. Then, sharply: "No one's passed, I suppose?"

The senior of the three men, who had served since the earliest years of the war and who still looked like a dachshund-breeder, facially not unlike a dachshund, ruminated a while before he answered: "No, sir. Nobody, sir—except the messenger."

Beuloh asked sharply: "What messenger? You mean the corporal?"

"No, sir. The young Jew."

"Jew! What Jew?"

"He said he had a message for you, sir. We told him where you were."

To Markfort, standing on the towpath just below the bridge, it was pleasant to know that somewhere, probably just behind the farthest chimney-stack he could see, Beuloh was posted, almost within hail. To be in touch with Beuloh gave him a feeling of security, for whatever one thought of Beuloh the man was recognizably sound at his own work. It had been a mercy—a last-minute stroke of good fortune—that he had not been with the main body under Lagenpusch. He could picture Lagenpusch now, nervous and fussy, giving orders and countermanding them, sending off one messenger and then another to bring him back. Always arrogant and heavy in his methods, Lagenpusch had, within the last few days, developed signs of a kind of neurosis. Perhaps a little blood-letting would bring him nearer normality, perhaps a being so nourished on lead and powder needed the smell and sound of gunfire—yes, there would certainly be gunfire—to tone his nerves, for surely the man's braggadocio had some better foundation than a youth of inflaming talk across wine-laden mess-tables. Markfort had never seen him as a commander, only as a routine-master; but he preferred to do this kind of work under Beuloh, who, coarse-tongued, brutal, uncompromising as Lagenpusch himself, had yet the fixity and quiet alertness of a born field-officer, the eye that from upright walls and a tree seen for an instant between two rows of houses will make a sketch-map that is ready for use at the next shifting of the pieces.

There was nothing to do. He had placed his men, had inspected their positions, had given final instructions; now he had only to wait until something happened. In the bottom of his pocket lay a crushed cigarette, dry and not beyond smoking. He itched to light it; thought, for a moment, of dismissing all temptation by throwing the thing into the canal—but cigarettes were too valuable. No one would see him; not one of his own men was near enough, and which of the women staring from upper windows was to know that, officially, he was on duty? Duty? The gravity of the word as his mind framed it amused him. But risk apart—and Lagenpusch was not without far-reaching ears—he had experienced too short an interval between school and army to ignore a trivial point of

discipline. He moved the cigarette to a trouser pocket, hoping to forget it, and went up on to the bridge. The mist was a little thinner, he thought, but he still saw the factory only as a pile of bricks rising out of the thicker fog that covered the canal. The slight rain, continuing steadily, was enough to be an annoyance, and the foul odour given off by the water seemed to be held and thickened by the hanging mist. He stamped his feet and yawned, feeling a growing exasperation. It was so unimportant, this pricking of a blister. In France the capacity for patience had grown upon him; he had spent more sleepless nights there, had been still more hungry, had stood for longer, peering at a wall of darkness, under colder and fiercer rain; but until the last months, almost to the numb finality of that November, he had felt, with the persistent romanticism of unfinished adolescence, that the task was important. Now, nothing was important. He tried to persuade himself that he was indifferent as to how the affair would go. "I have at least learnt," his mind repeated without articulation, "that my own sensations are of so little importance that the sensations of strangers can have no importance at all." And yet an echo of his forgotten chivalry insisted that their sensations mattered, that when the moment came he would find them mattering.

Turning, he saw that a little knot of men and boys had come up silently and were lounging a few feet away, their eyes fixed on him with stubborn curiosity. For an instant he quietly returned their gaze, glad to find human beings near him. Then, with a motion of his hand, he ordered them away. "There's nothing to stare at," he said. "You can't stay here. You must get right away from here. Go on!"

They went away slowly, but at a few paces two of them, a boy and an old man, turned to stare again, the boy grinning scornfully, the man dour and malevolent.

"Go on!" Markfort repeated.

The boy, suddenly scared, ran away. The old man shook his fist and then followed slowly.

Markfort crossed to the other side of the bridge, gazed up the canal for a few seconds, returned, and went down again to the tow-path. Still no shots, and the rain was increasing.

Gustav lay on his back in a corner of the assembling floor, snoring; fully dressed; for several nights he had not even unwound the black mercerised-cotton scarf he habitually wore about his neck. He had come in towards ten o'clock on the night before, sat for a while near

the unlighted stove, dumb, and shortly disappeared, presumably to rummage among those stores—food? cartridges?—of which only he and Max knew the exact hiding-place. He had appeared again at about three in the morning, sat for a few minutes turning the pages of Lassalle's *System*, which he had always in his pocket, and then settled himself for sleep. Only in sleep had his tongue been loosed, and Kudrnac, lying awake a few feet away, had heard him quoting from books, talking in a rambling way about pursuit, about action, with social philosophy and the technology of firearms intermingled; had twice seen him wake, sit up, groan and fall again into a restless slumber.

He was alone now, for Kudrnac, unable to sink even into a lower layer of consciousness, had at last gone away to occupy himself with cooking some soup for his breakfast; and he was sleeping more deeply when Max roughly woke him. He sat up, white-faced as a man awaking after drunkenness, and stared with one half-opened eye, his dark hair curtaining the other.

"Who are you?" he asked. "Why did you wake me, blast you!"

He was sinking back, but Max, with a knee between his shoulders held him up.

"You must wake up!" he urged. "Here! here's something to drink. There's trouble."

Gradually Gustav was coming to full consciousness. "Trouble?" he said, "what trouble?"

"They're all round us," Max said, and repeated, as he did not seem to understand, "they're all round us. I had a job to get back. The main lot's at the bottom of the Hausenstrasse—half a platoon, I should think. I don't know what they mean to do, but they'll be here as soon as it's light enough."

Gustav rose, staggering, to his feet. "I knew it would come," he said, half to himself. "That damned drunken fool Horstkötter!" Then: "Keep your tongue still for a bit, I don't want the alarm given before I know what I'm going to do—it's not like working a crew. There's no chance of our getting away, you're sure of that?"

"They're all round," Max said again.

"Well, come up and help me down with the Maxims. We'll get them placed at the corner windows."

Passing one of the windows he rubbed a pane and peeped out. "It's foggy still," he said. "If they'd any sense they'd close straight away. We couldn't do anything with them. Come on, we won't have too much time."

On the way up they came upon Klaus and Berta, sleeping side by side on a pile of tarpaulins. Gustav stooped and lifted the girl to her

feet. "We're going to be fired on in a minute," he said. "You'll have to make yourself useful. Come on, wake up! There's going to be a fight, do you hear? I'll want you to load rifles. That half-wit, will he do as he's told if we wake him?"

"He'll do what I tell him," she said.

Horstkötter, on the top floor was sleeping heavily, and was not wakened even by the clatter of rifles dragged in threes and fours towards the stairs. But when Klaus dropped the butt of a rifle on his thigh he got up, cursing. "You can hang on to that rifle," Gustav said tersely, "and fire when I tell you. If you fire before I'll blow your brains out. Max, must you make such a bloody noise with those guns?"

Kudrnac, returning to the assembling floor with the remains of his soup, became excited and childish at the sight of the preparations. "Are we really going to have a bang-off?" he asked. "Is it just a practice, or are we——?"

"You can go and stand by that gun," Gustav told him, "and fire it when I tell you. No, there's something better you can do. Go down to the basement and get Jak out. And Steppuhn. Bring them up here. Don't wake the others. If Sigvard's there, leave him. Then bolt the doors. If Schlunge's about you can bring him too. We haven't rifles for any more."

He ran to the other end of the floor. "You must get that gun better mounted," he said. "We can't afford wild shooting. Take that bench away. Get that other one up, it's stronger. Max, here! I want you to make small holes in all the bottom panes. Don't break them right away, and clean half a pane in each window, farther up, for observing. Klaus, shift that bench up to the windows, where there's a space. And get boxes on top, all the way along. Berta, you help him. Where's Horstkötter?"

He allowed them no candles and they moved in half-darkness, the dirty windows meagrely admitting the shrouded daylight. Horstkötter stood motionless with his rifle, sullen and frightened, till Gustav prodded his buttocks with his knee. "You can help with those boxes, Horstkötter!" Kudrnac, on his way down, thought regretfully that he had left the remains of his soup on the assembling floor. The turn of events was so sudden that he could hardly comprehend it, half thought Gustav was playing a joke on him (if Gustav were capable of joking) and hummed dreamily through slightly trembling lips. A tricky job, Gustav had given him. A compliment, perhaps. Klaus, physically stolid, his eyes excited, worked hard with the boxes. With two rifles under each arm Berta staggered down from the upper floor. Gustav, without raising his voice, cursed them incessantly as he moved

to and fro, kicking rubbish to one side, nailing a board across a weak part of one of the benches, shifting frames and trestles that blocked the free way to the doors.

Kudrnac returned alight with pleasure, the three picked men behind him. "I managed them!" he shouted. "They've got a case of gin down there, God knows where they got it. They don't know they're locked in yet." "You can go down to the loading floor," Gustav said curtly, "and help with sacks. You'll find Max there." He was rummaging feverishly amongst the litter of tools and laths, searching for nails, and when he turned he caught sight of Steppuhn, leaning unsteadily against a gap-lathe, in the act of loading a rifle. He said sharply: "Put that rifle down! No one's to use a rifle till I tell them." Steppuhn, grinning, raised the rifle and aimed it at him. Gustav ducked, sprang forward, wrenched it from his grasp, and with a blow of his fist sent the man reeling against the benches. "Here, Klaus! Horstkötter! Max!" he shouted, kneeling on Steppuhn's chest, "get on to this fellow. Get him tied up! There's rope in the corner there."

For twenty minutes after the diversion they worked, sweating, to improvise defences, while Gustav flogged them with his tongue. There were boxes of all sizes all over the factory, most of them on the upper floor, while the bottom floor was richest in sand, dirt and wood-dust. Horstkötter, with Berta to help him, was collecting the boxes and flinging them to the stairheads, where Kudrnac collected them and staggered down two on each arm. At the end of the loading floor Gustav and Max, stripped to the waist, forced tightly into the boxes the sand and rubbish which Klaus was collecting. Six boxes filled, and the three, panting, carried them up to the assembling floor, where Gustav arranged them against the windows, leaving only a narrow space for firing. Back again, twelve more boxes were waiting, were filled, carried up, placed in position. On the opposite side the wall was still unbattressed. "More dirt!" Gustav was shouting. "Here you, Schlunge! Go to the paint-shop. Break the door if you can't open it. There's a pile of cinders just outside there. Berta! For God's sake go and tell that Steppuhn if he doesn't stop his row I'll have his mouth plugged. Klaus! where's Klaus? Get on to that case—Horstkötter's too feeble to lift it. . . ."

For the twentieth time Klaus lurched against the wall, pushed the box he was carrying on top of the others, shoved it into position with his shoulder, and dropped back, exhausted. He walked a few feet, reeling, and sat down on the floor. In another moment Gustav would come and curse him for idling, and he would have to go down for another box; that was all he realized, that Gustav gave orders

and he must obey them. But he became aware that the activity about him had slackened. Gustav had stopped shouting. Even Steppuhn, tired of screaming for release or hoping that submission would pay him better, was silent. He saw Kudrnac put down a box and stand still to wipe his forehead; found that Berta was sitting close beside him; saw Gustav come in, spit on the floor, grunt and go to one of the windows. "And now what happens?" Kudrnac panted. But he was not answered.

The rest were together in a group now, and Max had lighted a cigarette. From below came faintly the noise of fists hammering on an iron door.

"And now what happens?" Kudrnac repeated.

Gustav turned presently and covered him with a sour smile. "We stay here until nightfall, gentlemen," he said, "or if anyone wishes he may take a walk in the streets. Only it will be necessary to keep the hands raised. I, personally, do not wish to find myself a soldier's prisoner."

He turned his back again and gazed out through the patch of glass that he had wiped clean. A curse, this interregnum, when the only chance of making an ordered resistance lay in keeping his men on the move. There was nothing to be done now; they had made what preparations they could, and the rest was luck. Before long the men locked in the basement would be mad with rage; Horstkötter or some fool would let them out, whatever his strictures; and of the others only Max was reliable, the rest would show the intelligence of the Gadarene swine directly the strain of waiting worked on their nerves. He looked fixedly at the windows of the nearest house, then at the street below, but could see nothing; no face, no movement. Max, surely, could not have been wrong? Or had the raiding party decided, at the eleventh hour, to pick a better day? That, surely, was impossible, unless they were so ridiculously sanguine as to believe that their advance into position had been unobserved. Why were they waiting?

He stalked across to the opposite window, ignoring curious stares, but from there he could see hardly anything beyond the canal. It had stopped raining altogether, but the mist was, if anything, thicker, and there was no sign of the sun. He went back to the other window and tried, blinking, to better the aim and length of his vision. He thought now that in a corner window of a house jutting forward a little to the right he could distinguish the outline of a face; but his eyes would not hold it, would not play on it with sufficient patience to make him certain. In any case it might be only a curious idler. He looked away and back. The face had gone—perhaps; he was

not sure. In turn he scrutinized the other windows, and a face seemed to have appeared in every pane; but when he shut his eyes for a second and opened them again he could see only a line of pale squares against the smoke-darkened brick, and a puff of wind, gathering the mist into a cloud, shut them off entirely from his sight.

It was no good staring. His eyes owed too much to sleep; and he knew from a hundred experiences that the more he looked the more would the broken rays dance upon his retinæ until all vision seemed delusion. He called softly to Kudrnac: "Kudrnac, old man. Can you come here a moment?" And when Kudrnac came, warmed by the trifling flattery: "You might stand look-out here for a bit. We shall have to keep watching all day. And you might glance at those windows opposite from time to time, to see if you see anything."

Further along Max, too, was staring out from another window. Gustav went to speak to him.

"See anything?" he asked, his voice lowered.

"No." And to answer the unspoken question Max added: "But I wasn't dreaming. They were all round this morning. Do you think they've thought better of it?"

"Unlikely."

Gustav walked away, but on a sudden impulse turned back and whispered again.

"They're waiting for the mist to clear. They don't know the lie of the place, and they don't know exactly what job they're tackling. It's all hearsay they're going on."

To his relief the other men had produced a pack of cards and were sitting in a circle at the far end of the floor, playing desultorily. They were talking in low tones, and he could not hear whether they discussed the situation or bandied trivialities. But the uproar below had increased.

"Look here!" he said to Max. "We can't leave those men making that shindy. It'll give the fellows outside more to think about than's good for them. You're lighter on your toes than me. Go down as quietly as you can and slip the bolt; don't let them hear if you can help it, then double up again and bolt the door at the top of the stairs."

"But if they go out——?"

"They won't. One or two of them may—we must risk that—but the rest'll drop back into their beloved little Sodom in the basement directly they find they can go where they like. Oh, there's a tin or two of salt beef—you know the place. You'd better put that where they'll see it. That'll keep them happy for a bit."

When Max had gone he turned his attention to Steppuhn, whom

he had forgotten, and who had fallen asleep in the corner beneath the benches where they had put him. He woke him, and asked severely: "Will you behave yourself and obey my orders if I let you loose? Yes? All right! Klaus, get me a knife!" But it was Berta who found one.

He went back to one of the windows and looked out.

"Have you seen anything?" he asked Kudrnac.

"No, nothing."

He heard Max come running up the stairs and slam the iron door at the top. Almost simultaneously the tumult below rose for a moment and then sank to a confused chatter. In half a minute a fist thumped on the bolted door and Sigvard shouted: "Here! What's all this? Open the door!"

Gustav went and addressed him through the keyhole.

"Is that you, Sigvard?"

"Yes, it is. And I want to know why——"

From behind him came the sound of three or four voices together.

"If you keep quiet a moment, I'll tell you," Gustav shouted.

"Send those fellows away, or I won't say anything. Are you sober?"

"I'm as sober as I ever want to be in this——"

"All right then. Have those others gone? All of them? Good! Well, there are soldiers all round this place, and when the fog clears there's going to be a little affair. Have you got that? Yes; there'll be some shooting most likely. Yes; it's all owing to that bloody fool Horstkötter. I can make things awkward for them as long as I'm not interfered with by your hooligans down there. Yes, your hooligans; you're their captain, aren't you? You've been spending all your time down there, anyway. What? That may be, but they're no damned good to me. If I gave them guns they'd only break a lot of windows—we'll need all the cartridges we've got up here. No, your job's to keep them quiet. If they like to go out and talk to the soldiers they can, but if they come up here they'll find a bullet coming through the keyhole. You'd better make that clear. And if they think there's any fun in living they'd do best to keep in the basement. When? It won't be more than ten minutes now—the fog's lifting."

But the fog was not lifting, and it was more than ten minutes. Gradually the noise below grew fainter—the men might be at work on the salt-beef, or more probably, since alcohol for a while cures the sensation of hunger, might be in conference on a plan for getting the situation into their own hands. Sigvard would not wait to seek opportunity for avenging his amour-propre. But it didn't matter, Gustav thought, when not one of them was capable even in full sobriety of

hatching a workable plot to capture and kill a chicken. Sigvard? A type, a fanatic, a disease on the body of revolutionary enterprise. It was the men up here he feared; he could work them as a field-section if they were still together when the moment came; but it was long in coming, and a horse he rode without bit or saddle, with only the grasp of his knees on its skinny flanks, might stumble or unseat him before he had seen the high fence and dared to use the spurs again. Already Horstkötter was putting sulky questions: "Would it be very injudicious, Herr Gustav, to light a candle or two . . . ? Pardon the question, but is the Herr Kapitän quite certain that our supplies are so great that there is no need to go out for more food . . . ? It is not, of course, possible, that our esteemed Herr Gustav is mistaken about the furious attack that is about to be launched upon us, the light being so uncertain?" And even in the dim light, Steppuhn's grins were visible, though his huge hand was half across his mouth.

"You are under no obligations to me, Horstkötter—or any of you," Gustav said, his lips hardly parted. "Go out if you please. You may discover empty streets. And if you happen to find yourself in a military prison for the rest of your days it will, after all, be a glorious finish to your career of resistance to militarist despotism. You may even be released after serving only ten years of your sentence, and then you will be able to work on a potato plot, like the nice constitution-loving citizens you all want to be, under kindly police supervision."

But sarcasm was a weapon that would rust if unsheathed too long. And their scepticism increased, awoke an echo in his own mind, when Kudrncac, who was still at his post by the window, reported that Sigvard and two others were out and calmly walking down the street. There was a rush for the peepholes, and they watched the three men disappear at the corner, unaccosted, scatheless. "And yet," Gustav repeated to himself, "Max couldn't have been dreaming. He's a dirty little scamp; if I were back at home I wouldn't have him in my kitchen, but he doesn't dream things. . . . If they've got those fellows, if they're pumping them. . . ."

It had, at least, broken the monotony, but it was the last break. The men below were singing now, but the sound died as one after the other fell asleep. Above, there was still the compounded sense of remote uncertainty that made sleep impossible. They longed to light the candles, to break all the windows and let in every particle of the feeble daylight. They were savage with Gustav, and still they dared not defy him. They were encouraged by Kudrncac, who had quietly left his place at the window and was feebly joking, but

in profile they could see Max's face as he stood by the corner window, alert, unnaturally serious, undoubting; and in the opposite corner, seriously, patiently, as children wait for Santa Claus at the chimney, Berta and Klaus were watching him.

Strangely, for that season, the mist still hung low, still showed no sign of lifting. Another hour had gone, Gustav guessed, and after twenty minutes thought again: "Another hour must have gone." There was a chance, a faint hope, that the mist would stay to meet the sunset. He wanted it to clear; he wanted a break in the encrusting dinginess; he wanted to see what he was doing; he wanted them, over there, to declare their hand. But the mist was more profitable. He could not guess what was in their mind, but if the fog restrained them, let it hold till nightfall, when escape would be so easy; if his men had lasted. And they would last; he would make them! He would make them last!

Max, steadfastly watching, realized by degrees what was the cause of his certainty. No one had passed, that was it. At normal times passers-by were scarce, since the canal separated two egocentric communities, and of late an honest citizen would go round and over the next bridge rather than pass the factory; but there were always a few passing, women who scuttled by fearfully, keeping close to the farther wall, youths who walked carelessly and upright, but with quick steps. To-day, no one. It was better, Max thought, to look out than inwards, where Berta and Klaus sat close together, where Gustav stalked dumbly from one window to another, where, in the half-light, the restless men grumbled in low voices, stamped up and down, yawned, stretched, waited with a patience that was like elastic, pulled out and out, further and further, always at the point of breaking. It was his business to watch—the others, Jak, or Kudrnac even, would have fallen asleep or been looking the other way when the thing happened. Not that he, Max, was a soldier; he despised soldiers, as he despised everyone who looked to coarse stimuli like that of killing for a relief from the eternal boredom that man is eternally engaged in conquering; he was a philosopher, an artist in living; he solved the human problem by turning his mind's eyes this way and that to catch the thousand facets, the delicate shades, the subtle contrasts, the dramatic trivialities that were rolled out into a straight bareness when they met an animal's bare, straight vision. Yet there was in his many-stemmed being a simple pride in his ordinary intelligence, in the knowledge that he could be more successful in the ordinary business of keeping oneself alive and avoiding suffering than those who boasted that their very dullness made them live more easily. He would not have worked for and obeyed Gustav

—even though he saw in Gustav a likeness, differently shaded, to his own spirit—had not the others been incompetent to serve or obey him. He had no wish to be superior in virtue, only to show his superiority in every ability but that of brute strength. For the moment, in this company of chattering pelicans, the part was good enough; and it meant, perhaps, his own salvation.

But his eyes were tiring. He felt that he could have watched with less effort and with greater endurance a changing scene, could have noted more easily every new pattern in a revolving kaleidoscope. To watch an empty stage, the boundaries ill-defined, the backcloth poor in features and perpetually curtained by a haze that was barely transparent, to watch hour after hour for the event of a single moment—that was more exacting. It seemed to him an unreality, a world so small, so changeless, so dark and silent. Had there been trees to mark the limit of vision he would have been content, for he could relish for a while the solitude of the country, but even when he momentarily closed his eyes he could still feel the hardness of the brown walls, could still see in every detail the grey roofs, a piece of broken gutter which hung down from the nearest house, the blank windows, the smears of mud on the roadway, a tub, a packing-case, a strip of twisted iron fencing. An idle breeze which had tried, playfully, to stir the mist, had long since puffed itself to exhaustion, and the air outside was now motionless, as stale almost as the air within. The houses seemed to be slanting inwards. The dark roof had fallen lower. It would be like this, fixed and imprisoning, until night came, and it seemed that night itself could hardly override it. He had no means to judge how long he had been watching, and he feared, pessimistically, that the sensation of hours elapsed only deceived him. The birds, if they were about, were not singing.

(“He’s got patience, old Lagenpusch,” Markfort thought, shivering and stamping. “He’s got more sense than I thought. He chooses his own time.”)

The door at the top of the stairs was still bolted, but there was no sign of discontent from the men below. “They’re thinking out something,” Schlunge said, but nobody heard him. Horstkötter had at last moved to the far end of the floor, and had succeeded in absorbing himself in carving a chip of wood into a little figure. It was not for him, he told himself, to be mixed up with this futile situation that Gustav and Max had created for their own eccentric amusement. He would have played his violin, which was near at hand, but they would not let him. “A tune would pass the time,” he said, like a wandering minstrel pleading admittance to the tap-room. But they preferred to count the time in yawns and sneezes, in clicking

their tongues and beating their hands on the benches. While for Klaus all time would pass in a new monotony where his spirit, half-awake, gazed idly at the succeeding shadows. Berta was close by, in time she would get him something to eat, would tell him it was time to sleep. He was content when she was near. Though he felt, playing upon the outer fringe of his consciousness, the excitement left over from this morning, the excitement, now restrained, which still tingled, loose and taut, oscillating, between the minds of the men around him. He was prepared for what might happen.

An ant which had travelled all the way along one bench began the homeward journey back. But when it arrived it would not stay there. Like the spider busily spinning between the shaft and ceiling overhead it had still more work to do; perhaps, mysteriously, an object or a destination. Steppuhn, idly watching it, was trying vaguely to decide whether the beast were sensible. "Ten minutes," he thought, "or when the bug gets level with the vice handle, and I'll let off one of those guns. It will make a diversion. . . ."

The hours went by.

"It will last," Gustav thought. Passing down the room he scanned the faces with a single glance. Further and further the elastic was stretched, but still it was not broken. He came close to Max and whispered: "It will last." Max, with a jerk of his head, asked: "But them?" "They daren't go out," Gustav muttered, and over Max's shoulder he was staring through the window at the protecting mist. "They could hang them, any of them. There's evidence. That's why they're here." "They're not here to be soldiers," Max said. "It was because they didn't like being soldiers——" "It will last," Gustav whispered fiercely, still staring through the window.

And even as he stared the mist was clearing.

It reminded Max of a scene change in Tannhäuser, as he had once seen it from the back of the Bayreuth theatre, so swift, and yet, in the motion of its several phases, imperceptible. As if folded back by a strong, gentle hand, the roof of cloud lifted and rolled away, to stay for a moment piled dark above the house-tops; and the mist, loosed from its imprisonment, fled silently. Suddenly, when the uppermost layer of cloud had gone, the sun shone down obliquely, melted the remnants of the brume and lit garishly the smoky façade of the surrounding houses. It glistened against the windows, pointed every detail, emphasized the pallor of the scrubby trees, exposed the countryside of slate and brick in hideous nakedness. Somewhere out of sight a hammer fell, and a bullet shattered against the factory wall.

The report was answered by another, on the other side, and the

second bullet splintered a pane of the window. A flying fragment ripped an inch of skin off Schlunge's cheek. Max turned his face and smiled. "After all, I was not dreaming," he said.

With a leap forward Steppuhn was by one of the rifles, but as his hand caught the barrel a shout from Gustav stopped him, and turning, he saw the muzzle of a revolver pointed at his chest.

"All right," Gustav said. "You can have that rifle. But you're not to fire it till I tell you. No one's to fire till I give the word. You can take the next one, Schlunge—what are you whimpering about? Berta, find a rag and tie it round his face. Max, stay by that window. Keep your eyes skinned. Keep down low all of you. Kudrnac, get by the other window. Keep your eyes on the corner—they may come up that way. Horstkötter, give that rifle to Klaus, he can shoot it off straighter than you can. You stand by with Berta to reload. Jak, I want you on that Maxim. No, keep down. I only want one at the window."

At the sound of the first shot the noise had broken out below, and they heard a rush of footsteps on the stairway.

"Here, Kudrnac!" Gustav called. "Give that rifle to Berta. Go and tell those men to keep quiet. Tell 'em they'll all be killed if they don't stay in the basement."

Already fists were hammering at the door outside and there were shouts of "Rifles! We must have our share! Rifles! Open this door!"

"Tell 'em you'll fire through the keyhole," Gustav added.

Kudrnac's voice, roaring the message against the iron door, was broken by two more reports, one on each side, and another pane of glass fell in splinters. The noise on the stairs only increased: "What are you doing? Why don't you fire? Open this bloody door!" until Gustav himself ran to the door to yell threats and curses. "I know what I'm doing. . . . You can squeal when you've got a bullet in you. . . . Do you think I've got powder to waste firing at a wall?"

Gradually the shouts died and gave place to the noise of retreating footsteps. Another report. Another. Two more windows broken. Then a lull. And across the ensuing silence a shout, loud and clear.

"I give you one minute to get out of that building!"

"Keep down!" Gustav shouted. "Right down! Flat on the floor. You too, Max. I'll look out."

He had pushed Max aside and was standing at the window. He was counting. "Nine, ten, eleven." "Kudrnac! Look out opposite! All clear there? Keep down everybody!" "Fifty-two." He glanced once again, sweeping the whole terrain, and

then crouched, still counting; and at fifty-eight came the deafening rattle.

A sharp hail swept evenly across the windows, back again, a foot lower; a moment's pause and it swept the lower windows, down again, and then the lowest rank of all. It was over in a few seconds, leaving two rows of glassless window squares, shattered wood, a line of bullet marks on the opposite wall. At the moment when the fire swept downward Gustav, risking the supporting volley of a second gun, had leapt to the window; and while the bullets still riddled the lower windows he saw men running, half a dozen of them, emerging from the corner in quick succession, bent double. He shouted "Max!" and Max was there already, on the gun. "Let go!" he yelled, and the "go" was drowned by the *thaccarack* as Max pressed the trigger. Gustav leapt to the next window and picked up the rifle. With the corner of his eye he saw two men drop, the rest running back. But his attention was on the house opposite. It was there, on the roof, just showing, the barrel of a Maxim. He could see the man's arm, and he fired. Arm and gun disappeared; it might have been a hit. "Move that gun to the next window!" he called. Carefully, he fired three shots into the opposite windows. "Keep down you, Horstkötter!" he shouted. "There'll be another in a minute. Klaus, get by that window opposite. Fire if you see anyone. Shoot carefully. Max, take the—look out!"

The second fusillade began low and travelled upwards. In the second's lull that preceded its final jump they heard a man below shrieking. Then, like a stick along iron railings, the bullets stabbed the windows in breathless succession, tearing, splintering, seeming to rend the very walls. Horstkötter, standing dazed, had taken one in his shoulder, and they saw him lying on the floor, crying childishly. The ripple of destruction had passed over Klaus's head, but he hardly realized. He was still upright by the window, with his rifle pointed, pale and happy. He was aware that only he stood on this side. The rifle—he had never fired one, but Kudrnac had told him how. He was all ready. And before the volley ended, to be followed by another, he saw, in the twenty yards of street that lay within his range, a man advancing. His hand was quite steady. A little way in front, Kudrnac had said, the leaf dead in the middle of the V. He pulled the trigger. Something nicked the flap of his ear, making him cry out with the sudden pain. When he looked he saw the man on his knees, bent double. He fired again, saw another man come up, and fired twice more. Behind him he heard the Maxim cracking. Gustav, at the high window over the street, saw the door below open and two men rush out

blindly, the first with a piece of lead piping in his hand. They ran three yards and fell together. There was a shout from the stairs of "Rifles! You must give us rifles!"

Stepping back, Gustav picked up a piece of a rag and wound it round his left wrist. "Kudrnac!" he shouted, "take that second gun up to the top floor. The corner window. Take Schlunge with you to load—and a rifle. Don't fire until you see them coming. But keep looking out—they won't get you at that window!"

The Maxim fire had stopped, and in its place bullets came singly, carefully aimed at the windows. Max, at the third window, was working systematically, waiting behind the barricade till a bullet drilled the board he had placed for it, then instantly firing where he saw the smoke. At the next window Gustav took up his position and did the same. Waited, fired, tightened the bandage on his wrist. Waited, fired. From the end window Steppuhn had dropped back without even a cry. Jak glanced at him and troubled no further. "Berta!" Gustav called, "come here and——" But instinctively she dropped on to the floor, and as the Maxim stuttered again the four men copied her. Two guns now, three, working together. They lay quite still, waiting for extinction, while with a noise that stunned sensation a storm of biting lead thrashed against the wall, swept it from end to end, back again, back again. "That's the end," Max thought dimly. "They're closing in now." There was a rifle at his elbow, he had grasped it and was wriggling towards the street window. Protection there, with the mounted machinery at the corner. Something had hit him in the neck, but it was nothing. He climbed on the bench, almost feeling as he did so the stream of bullets pouring past behind him; peeped out, and remained staring, fascinated. At least a dozen of them, running hard, the nearest only fifteen yards off. It would take four seconds. He leaned out, took aim and fired at the foremost. But it was the second who dropped, and the fourth and fifth and sixth. He was aware then that the din was augmented from above. Kudrnac! He had picked his moment. Three men were still running and one hurled a grenade wildly, but it fell yards short. He fired, and got the first of them. The Maxim fire had risen. Kudrnac was getting it now. He turned and saw Gustav crawling through the door. Horstkötter was on his back, dead, and Jak lay a yard away. A rifle bullet stabbed the bench behind him lonely and harmless. The noise died to an intermittent crackle.

At the window on the canal side Klaus was standing, unscathed except for a hole in his ear, from which the blood fell in large drops.

He was reloading his magazine, slowly and deliberately, like a grandmother with a sewing-machine. "I got two of the Englishmen," he said, looking round and meeting Max's eye, "the others ran back." "You'd better keep your fire," Max said sharply, running out to the stairs. "We've got little enough."

On the top floor he found Gustav, with a little twisted smile, kneeling by the side of Schlunge, who lay with his knees drawn up, moaning. Berta stood by with an impassive face, ripping Schlunge's shirt, which Gustav had dragged off him, into long pieces. She was handing them to Gustav one by one. Near the window Kudrnac leant against one of the benches, reloading his gun. His eyebrows had been singed, and his face was grey and old and sleepy.

"You'd better help Kudrnac with that gun," Gustav said, without turning his head, "he doesn't understand it properly. (Berta! Run and find some more rag!) Is Klaus all right? Still watching on the canal side? Good! They'll make another attempt in one minute."

He was pulling on the bandage, pushing it under Schlunge's waist, drawing it over and tightening again. He was panting, and his orders came still more jerkily. Not that it was any good, he thought; a mile of yard-wide linen wouldn't have stopped that flow, and inside everything was minced. Extraordinary that the fellow retained consciousness. He'd be no use any more. ". . . in one minute"—but he hoped they would have longer than that. One minute wouldn't do. Kudrnac had jammed the gun most likely. Five minutes, and he could make a show for them. Damn this fellow, crying like a rabbit and not dying. "Shall I shoot you?" he asked again, but Schlunge appeared not to hear him. Must be more than a minute now. Those fellows were finding the price too high, they were getting wary. Or the men had mutinied—it wasn't unlikely. Someone was still systematically plugging bullets into the windows, but that would do them no good. Kudrnac had come over and was standing watching him; a professional interest, perhaps, in the sight of a man dying. The Maxims still quiet—what luck! "I can't think why you're all hanging round!" he rasped. "D'you think there's nothing to do? This floor's going to be shredded in ten seconds. Max! Pull yourself together! Take that gun away from there. Take it down. Here, take the revolver, shoot anyone who gets in your way. Get the gun placed by the lower window in the corner. Tell Klaus to go down too—I'll look after this fellow."

Reluctantly they left him. They wanted to be all together; they were so few now. A mercy, Gustav thought, as helplessly

he watched Schlunge writhing, a crowning mercy that they'd chosen this moment for their *reculement*. Evidently they were not going to use their bullets like acorns. It couldn't last, it was only *pour mieux sauter*. They would try another way; from the canal side, probably, where they would be better covered. It couldn't last, and his own powder could not last either, not much longer. But he had them guessing now, they didn't know where his guns were, or how many. And already the light was failing.

He left the tortured man and went to the window, choosing the one where a few dirty panes were still intact, to give him cover. Yes, he was not mistaken. A new bank of clouds was piling up, and an early evening would finish the short-lived daylight. They might last out till dark now, and in the dark they would get away—it would take a hundred men at least to make the cordon that could stop them. A poor victory; but he would have taught them something—that Germany might ponder the social issue when she next flung the proletariat into uniform; yes, they had learnt the trick of fighting. He looked down towards the street corner and saw, a few yards from cover, two bodies still lying. Yes, they had learnt the trick of it. Germany had taught them.

From a house far over to the right a man was still firing intermittently, aiming obliquely at the windows, and one in five of his bullets tore the wood about the floor or chipped the farther wall. Crouching, Gustav went back to Schlunge, who was still and silent now, and turned him over. Finished, at last. He went downstairs and found Max arranging guns and rifles at the windows of the first floor. At opposite windows Klaus and Kudrnac were watching.

"He's dead," Gustav said. "Any trouble from the men below?"

Max said: "No."

"Well, there'll be every sort of trouble in two minutes. They haven't long they can wait."

But it was queer, he thought, no trouble from below.

"Berta!" he said, throwing her a key, "go up and see if you can find some food. We may as well have it if there is any. Quick as you can, and lie down flat wherever you are when the Maxims go. Kudrnac, I want you on that rifle at the end window. Max'll look out. You can stay where you are, Klaus. Shout if you see anything. I'll be back in a minute."

He went out and down the stairs, cautiously, for his nerves were affected by the new silence. At the bottom of the stairs he found the iron door shut and bolted. Returning, he said nothing.

Uncertain of the time—no one had a watch in going order—

Max glanced hopefully towards the sky, but could not be certain, for the sun was already invisible, whether darkness was really coming or whether the day would yet stretch out interminably, the sun using the clouds to mask a slow retreat. The air had grown heavy again, but with a new heaviness, the oppressive stillness of approaching storm; hotter, more stifling; and the clouds, which had tightened into an unknown pall, low, confining, were dull grey in colour with a tint of umber. It was better, Max thought, this sense of a storm coming, than the shaded stillness of the earlier hours, which had given no warning, had served only to hide unknown hazards, had held no promise. The lull had given to his spirit an aching restlessness, as if a muscle had been stretched by violent exercise and suffered relaxation hardly. He was ready now for a natural storm, which, in his vague anticipation, would submerge the nearer squall of lead and powder. The uproar of the overburdened sky in explosion, at once harmless and terrifying in its splendour, would inspire an exalted fear to override the creepy nervousness engendered by the searching whiplash of bullets. If night came, so much the better. He would see the lightning more vividly. He did not share Gustav's confidence that in the darkness escape would be easy; but if these were his last hours—and he could not think it, so new and keen was his sense of the varied stimuli in living—it would be a good night to die in.

His upward glance had lasted only for an instant, enough to feed his desire for external encouragement, and his eyes, still labouring, were playing carefully over the houses, fixed for a moment on each of the windows, probing among the roofs and chimneys, constantly dropping to scrutinize the street corner, from which the real danger would come. In the few minutes of sunshine it had been easy to watch, but in the returning twilight every object, barrels, low walls, tool-houses, would, when the eye held it for a moment, merge into its neighbour; and in every deeper shadow a man might be hiding. Away on the right a rifle still cracked spasmodically, but the intervals were greater, and he could not locate the man's position. Could he have seen a puff of smoke and taken a chance shot at it his restlessness would have been appeased; but again he was watching an empty stage, and he began to feel that his watch had been unbroken, that he had spent a lifetime in the pitiful duty of seeing nothing happen. Night or the storm would at last release him. But till then the only relief from the encaging brick and mortar was the figures of the two men lying in the roadway, and it seemed, so still they lay, that even these were only drab monuments, waxwork corpses to people a universe of board and canvas.

The sight which first broke the tension was the only one he had not anticipated.

When he heard the sound of a bolt drawn he started; and a moment later he called: "Here, Gustav! Look!" The wicket had opened, and one after the other, with their hands raised high above their heads, the men were trooping out. In single file they shuffled down the street, their attitude of surrender respected, and at the corner they disappeared. No sign or sound marked their reception. In a few seconds the incident was over.

At Max's cry the four of them had run to the windows, heedless of the risk, and had watched, speechless. Gustav spoke first.

"Fools!" he said. "The incomparable fools!" He had turned his back on the window and stood now, feet apart, his hands in his pockets, grey with rage, staring, for want of a better object, at Kudrnac's stomach. "We've saved their skins," he said, "we've held the blasted soldiers off, we've got 'em all guessing, and those quarter-wits give themselves up! They choose this, of all moments. Sheep-hearted bastards! Why have they waited all this time? Why couldn't they wait a bit longer? My God, I hope they shoot them, every damned one of them! Toad-livered fools!"

For the first time that day he sat down, on the end of a saw-trestle, and put his hands across his eyes. And then he heard Kudrnac chuckling.

"Is it very funny?" he asked furiously.

"They don't matter," Max broke in. "If they want to give 'emselfes up—well——"

"You may not think it funny," Kudrnac tittered, "but I think it's the most superb joke I've ever experienced. They've got them, don't you see? They're happy! They've got to take it out of somebody, having half a dozen of their men scuppered, and now they don't have to look any further. They're at it now, most likely." His voice gave way, and he laughed uproariously. "And we're left," he shouted, "to enjoy the joke by ourselves."

"I don't see that that's very funny," Berta said.

"And if you want 'em to think the factory's empty," Max said caustically, "you won't help much by making that damned row."

But Kudrnac was beyond their control, and Gustav, silent, his face buried, did nothing. Kudrnac laughed on, no longer loudly, but gustily, his long body convulsed. When he stopped laughing it was only to break into singing:

*We're up, we're up, we're marching,
We're alive in the light of the day——*

and when his voice broke to a falsetto his laughter started again, shrill and spasmodic, uncontrolled, like the giggling of a nervous girl. "Give me a rifle!" he shouted between the spasms. "Let me have another shot at the bastards! Berta! find me a rifle . . . load it for me!"

Klaus might have given him a rifle, but Max would not have allowed him. It was the storm coming, Max thought, that had set Kudrnac off. Ridiculous fellow! But he felt in his own head the tingle of hilarity. The last rifle had ceased firing. The long day was over, the curtain had slipped across and only now had the actors realized. He smiled, and he saw that Berta was smiling, and even in Klaus's bleary eyes there was the echo of a smile. Over; finished. The ending had been quaint and unexpected, a neat trick of the dramatist; unsatisfactory; the end should have come with the crash of an orchestra; but it was over, and they could relax and cease watching, and cease wondering, and go on to discover in the paler hours if living, that had seemed so precious, was only a negative desire.

Gustav rose slowly, pale but calm again, and went back to the window.

"I suppose you think," he said over his shoulder, "that they'll leave us alone now? You think they won't ask those fools whether there's anyone left, even if they haven't heard Kudrnac screaming like a baby?" (And remembering the bolted door, "They won't have to ask twice," he thought.) "And now we can all live happily ever after, and found a new Germany!" he concluded.

His broad shoulders and his big square head seemed to fill the window. They stared at him for a moment, wondering at his tenacity, admiring and pitying him. They did not believe him. It would be enough for the soldiers, they thought, to have so many in their basket; they would not risk more lives to get the paltry handful that remained. They five were the chosen of fortune. The fury was over and they were left.

At the end of the floor a man lay, face downwards, and in one of his pockets Max found a cigarette. With his eyes on Gustav he lit it, ceremoniously, and sat down with his back against one of the benches. Berta, bless her! had found some food; a couple of oranges, bad but edible, a stale black loaf, a little box of sugar. She had offered some to Gustav, but he had refused it abruptly. Kudrnac, still tittering, was munching intermittently, and Klaus, with his mouth full of orange, was trying clumsily to open a tin with a bradawl. Berta herself ate nothing, and she had not lost her look of patience, nor entirely her alertness. Yet she was happy; her face at least had got its faint colour of rose again, instead of the Chinese

yellow. She eyed Max in a friendly fashion, she made little jokes in Kudrnac's car, and she was not too busy now to issue her little orders to Klaus. "Sit up, Klaus! Sit still while I do up your ear, it's messing everything. No, leave that rifle alone. You can't use it now." Nice little thing! Max thought, although she was so ugly; and so dirty and unkempt and unfeminine. "And yet," he pondered, refusing her offer of the orange and enjoying his cigarette, "she is the very emblem of femininity." He noticed—the others did not—that she had not thought to eat anything, that with better nerves than Kudrnac she found all the relief she wanted in petty busy-ness, in passing food, in re-bandaging Gustav's wrist, in brushing a patch of floor with her hand before, in her filthy torn dress, she would sit on it. "They are like that, women," he thought, "they feel nothing, they have no emotional daintiness, their brains are nine parts mechanical, they live and move by self-created habits; they, eternally normal, are destined by almighty providence to keep men, who are sensitive and elastic, down to their own normality." And yet she kept away from the body that lay a few feet behind him, which was nothing but a man's shirt and trousers, and a little hair showing, and a teaspoonful of blood in the armpit. She had stood by unmoved while Schlunge had writhed in hideous torment, but now, if she went to the top floor again, she would make a circuit to avoid his remains. And Klaus, a dead thing, an animal with no mentality beyond the uprush of crazy emotions, it was he whom she tended, petted, whose company she sought. That was why he wanted her now, when his tired body and spirit cried for extravagance. It was because she was mysterious, and mystery was what the word "woman" meant to him. It was because she was plain, ordinary, so slight that at a glance you seemed to see all round and through her, and yet in every gesture of arms or lips a pattern of woman-ness, apart, remote, unexplorable. Watching her thin face in the dim light he thought that he knew her less than he knew Klaus; for in Klaus the mystery was that of a ragged house at the cliff's edge, one half taken and scattered by the encroaching sea, unrecoverable, only to be guessed from the unclosed walls still standing; while she was a structure complete, enclosed on every side, the walls high and the windows curtained, plain for every man to see but holding fast its secret, which might be—pure emptiness. He could spend a lifetime guessing, but he would never find her.

His cigarette was out, but he had taken two and he lit the other. It was surely darker. The windows of this floor were cleaner than those of the floor above, but he could hardly see now to the far end, and if Gustav had allowed them they would have lit a candle to

encircle their companionship. Klaus shivered, and Berta asked him: "Are you cold, Klaus?"

"No," he said.

"Then why are you shivering?" Max asked with a grin.

"It's dark," he said.

"Don't you like darkness?"

Klaus pondered.

"I prefer to be outside when it's dark," he said absently.

Kudrnac, who had been engaged in peeling an orange, dropped his knife suddenly and looked up.

"That's a good idea, Klaus," he said. "We'll take a walk, you and I. It will clear——"

"No one's to go out!" barked Gustav, without looking round. "You'll stop here, all of you, on this floor, till I give my permission."

With a boyish grimace Kudrnac sat down and went on peeling. Max met his eye and then smiled—the first time, perhaps, that they had smiled together. It was a token of their survivorship. The best of them, Max thought then, excepting Gustav, without Horstkötter's wits (Horstkötter, what had happened to him? he couldn't remember); without the primordial fire of Sigvard; but lean and useful, polished and cheerful-hearted, a wreck, but the wreck of an elegant vessel, one that had floated gaily in scener waters and had still a jauntiness in the cock of its bowsprit as it lay half-submerged on the mud-flats. He came from those who did not trouble, were not vexed with the importance of life; who could please themselves with smaller efforts, who hung their houses with Watteau, who never saw the social meaning of politics but would march behind a bright-coloured flag; and had yet the stamina to march long distances. Had he, Max asked himself, enjoyed Kudrnac only for his eccentricity, as a deep lover of the eccentric? Was it only this moment, in a failing light and with his spirit encased in weariness, that he saw this man, grimy and unshaven, reduced by nervous strain to childishness, as a being with whom he could have something of the kinship he felt towards scraggy Hungarian youths and big-breasted Jewish matrons? Yes, he must not be deceived, he must not allow sentiment to cloud his mind's vision. It was the force of fatigue and the descending twilight that bound them, which drew in to their ring of sympathy even Gustav, as he stood apart from them at the window, motionless as a man in deep slumber. He could like even Klaus now, forget contempt and remember only pity. For Berta, sitting there immobile and expressionless, he could feel a tenderness. It was not his ordinary pleasure, and under the next daylight he would find himself examining their foibles, noting again with subtle enjoy-

ment every revealing word and gesture that took its place in the ironic pattern of his philosophy. But he would remember these moments, as the taste of a sweet wine; a wine of which he despised the sweetness but which he had held for a moment, not without pleasure, upon his tongue.

His nerves were easier and he no longer yearned for the breaking of a storm; except physically, for it was hot and close, and there was new sweat on his forehead. The storm would come. He could still feel its approach, and from where he sat he could see through the high windows the clouds still darkening. But he might sleep and awake to find it over, for he was no longer conscious of any tension. Their power to anticipate fearfully was expended for that day. Even had they believed that their safety was only illusory, they could not have dreaded the next outbreak, for the long concentration upon alarm had engendered a sense of its unreality. Their limbs had relaxed and they sprawled now, Max resting back on his hands, Kudrnac full length with his head supported on his elbow, Klaus with a low trestle beneath his armpits. The food was finished and they were thirsty, but to move and go after water would have broken the spell of stillness. They would stay there, stained and sweating in silence till the full darkness closed their eyes. And Gustav, if he wished it, could go on watching, impassive, at the window.

But Gustav was infected, more than they would have dreamed, by their lassitude. He held his body straight, his head steady, conscious that he was their only sentinel; and yet he watched only mechanically, passively, waiting for what would come. His eyes no longer roved over the whole view, but rested at a point ahead, a featureless patch of wall, and he blinked only when they were blurred to sightlessness. There was a dangerous moment coming, he knew, the moment when the soldiers might think it dark enough to make a final effort, more confident now that they knew more exactly the nature of their objective; the issue would lie in which side were first the bolder. Yet he could not concentrate his thought on that moment, could not make plans, could not drive his mind to realize its importance. His mouth was dry, his clothes felt as if they had been on him for many weeks, he was conscious of the slight, gnawing pain in his wrist, and his thoughts wandered every way; to the part he had taken at La Fère-Champenoise (every detail vivid, the falling roof of the manor-house, the three shells bursting in a line in the roadway, the brown stain on the shoulder of Hilgenfeld's jacket); to the days, further back, when he had taken his wife and son to church at Kottbus; to his imprisonment in the Liegnitz gaol for seditious libel. "I can only wait now," he thought, "for the darkness." But

the darkness was slow in coming, and he could not visualize the rush to escape, the dash across the roadway, the clambering through friendly or timid houses, the picking of hidden and tortuous streets. Hardly could he persuade himself that he would not order them to sleep, and sleep himself, risking the morrow. "Perhaps," he thought sleepily, "they will be content with those they have taken already."

How far his mood had changed, his resolution weakened, he realized only when it crossed his mind that the other side of the factory was unguarded; and that realization stung him into new liveliness. He asked sharply: "Why is no one at that window, on the canal side? Max, I thought you had some sense!" He strode across himself and looked carefully up and down the street. It was still empty. No one had risen at his command. "Berta!" he said, returning, "you can take that window for a bit. In a quarter of an hour Klaus will relieve you." Despite Max's grimace she obeyed him, and on his own side he went on staring, staring.

He was beginning to be aware again that his resolution was failing, that he could not bring himself to care about the issue, when he found, suddenly, that the buildings he had watched were hidden. He blinked twice, thinking that his eyes were failing, and believing next that a new mist had formed outside the window, for it was not like the darkness of night, and night could not have closed in so rapidly. He heard Kudrnac ask: "I say, Max, do you smell something?" and Max reply languidly: "There are eighty-three separate smells in this factory." He knew, then.

"Max!" he called, "go down and——" but then he remembered the bolted door. He sniffed again. Kudrnac was right. And then he heard Max's voice again: "My God!"

There were five seconds of silence, while the odour of burning wood increased till each one of them had smelt it. A noise had started, a rustle and crackle that increased to a low continuous roar before they were fully aware of its significance. Simultaneously the floor had become still darker, as the first cloud of ascending smoke was followed by another, browner and more opaque, which rose like a curtain, clinging to the walls; while through every hole and crack in the rotten floorboards a trickle of smoke leaked upwards to form a little cloud, and the clouds joined into a blanket of haze below the ceiling. The closeness of the air had tightened, it had become dry, brittle, and suffocating, and it was already hot. The stillness like that of a cathedral, which had echoed even their whispers, the fixity of their surroundings, had submitted to changing motion suddenly, like the inwards of a ship that seem to be a founded house until she passes beyond the moles into rough water; a change as rapid

and dreadful, as eerie and unexpected, as the commotion of an earthquake. For five seconds they stood transfixed, as men are still and silent, paralysed, at the moment when their ship heels over and waits for an instant, seeming unsupported; and of the five of them it was Kudrnac who first shouted, in a queer, shrill voice: "We're alight!"

As if the three had been unleashed by the same slipper, Kudrnac, with Max on his heels and Berta a yard behind, rushed headlong to the doorway, and deaf to Gustav's shout, "No good—locked in!" rushed down the stairs in a body. Above the growing noise of the eating flames came their frantic curses, the sound of their bodies hurled against the door. "They won't break it," Gustav said tersely. He went out and stood on the landing. "They won't break it," he repeated, lost, planless. Then: "And who the devil started it?" Klaus, standing quietly behind him, smiling, said: "I did."

Gustav turned on his heel, thunderstruck. The boy had not been to the ground floor since early morning. "You're mad!" he said. "Why should you?"

"They were after my mother. I wouldn't let them get her!"

"You're mad!" Gustav repeated. He stared for a moment at the boy, incarnation of smiling insanity, and for a second thought that his own reason was failing, that the figure before him was corporate evil, clothed hideously in flesh and hair by his own mute terror. "The guns!" he shouted, and pushed the boy aside, and ran back on to the floor where the smoke was now steadily rising. With a Maxim clutched in one arm, a rifle in the other, he returned to the landing. "Hold these!" On to the floor again and back with the other Maxim. At the foot of the stairs Kudrnac, like a baited bull, threw himself once more against the unyielding door. "It's no good!" Max gasped. Below the door the smoke drifted freely, and it was coming now through a hole in the wall. Choking, Berta retreated up the stairs, Max after her. "It's no good!" he shouted back, but Kudrnac only stepped back two paces and flung himself on the door again. A dense cloud came between them. "Kudrnac! Come!" Berta shouted, and diving through the smoke Max caught him by the arm just as he fell weeping on the ground. "Up!" Max shouted, and cragged him, and they stumbled together to the landing, where already the smoke was so thick that they could hardly see Berta two yards in front of them. She was calling weakly, "Klaus!" but there was no answer. "Go on up!" Max panted, and they ran to the second floor and found it empty, already blue with the smoke drifting in from the stairway. "Up again!" and they ran up, without purpose, knowing only that the smoke advanced behind them. Reaching the third floor they came upon Klaus, who

ran towards them crying. "Have you seen mother? She's not here!" and ran from them again, overturning benches, pulling out cases, shouting. At the window Gustav, with his back turned, was loading one of the Maxims, deliberately, to make the occupation last, and he did not turn to greet them.

To this floor the smoke had not yet penetrated, only the odour of burning, and the dull murmur of the fire below. The air was still fit for breathing, but already hot and dry, and before their smoke-stung eyes the walls seemed to bend a little in gentle waves, the floor seemed to rise and fall, objects to be enlarged and diminished, quivering. They saw it, an uneasy sanctuary, with the sight of drunkards. It stood in their major senses like the vision of a dream, but in their nostrils the odour was coarse with reality. Their desire was at once to enjoy their respite—to be still, as if by stillness they could conjure back security—and to be madly in motion, to fight, while they had air to breathe in, against the pursuing destruction. But there was no enemy, nothing to fight against. The serenity of their prison, solid, empty, almost silent, mocked them; and again they waited, with no occupation, no signal to mark the passing seconds. To wait was the only effort, the only torture that was beyond their endurance; and still they were waiting, idly, as they had waited all day; but no longer for a storm that might pass over. It seemed to them now that from every other danger they could escape easily, that the alarms of the day, long in endurance but momentary in recollection, had passed without trouble, had been resisted without effort or courage. There was Horstkötter, lying unnaturally with his beard soaked in blood, there were others, sprawling stiff beneath the benches, to remind them that death had passed that way; but these belonged to the fringe of their society, they were men who had lived once and suffered accident; they, in their insensibility to the smell, the increasing murmur of the fire below, were different beings, like insects to which death comes quickly and should mean nothing. They who remained, the five blessed of fortune, they alone of all generations experienced the knowledge of gradual immolation; discovered for the first time and were the first to discover fear.

Below them the fire burnt purposefully. It had drunk up the wood-dust and shavings carefully arranged to feed it, and begun to wean itself on to more solid food, laths and cases, stacked benches. A draught from the broken windows fanned it steadily, and already the taller flames were gnawing the rafters of the ceiling. Prodigiously it increased in heat and power.

It was Max who first realized the obvious truth. For half a minute he had stood dazed, still coughing from the smoke in his

lungs, unable to collect his senses. Then, as if the notes of a violin leapt above the reverberation of bass-drums, his reason overrode the tumbled chaos of sensation, and he saw that as the greater fear conquered the lesser they were no longer imprisoned.

He shouted, running: "The fire-stairs!" but Gustav stopped him.

"Not yet! Go back! They'll only get you!"

For a moment he could make nothing of Gustav's caution, but he realized, just as he reached the door, the fact that had been clear in Gustav's mind from the beginning; that the fire-stairs were useless until the smoke was thick enough to screen them. Beyond the canal a man would be standing at one of the windows, his rifle sighted on the door, waiting for it to open. A moment before Max had cursed himself for ignoring in his panic the obvious way of escape. He thought now that he had been a fool to indicate it to the others. It was too late. Kudrnac, awaking as if from a dream, was upon him, wrenching at the handle of the door as he stood with his back against it. He said, as if to a pawing dog: "No, Kudrnac! Gustav says not yet," and with forearm flung back from the elbow pushed him away.

Kudrnac, standing still in amazement at such stupidity and violence, asked in a quivering, hollow voice: "Do you realize that we're on fire? Do you realize——?"

Gustav came across and seized him by the arm.

"It's all right, Kudrnac. No need to get worked up! It may go out—and if it doesn't it'll take ages to get up as far as this."

Into Kudrnac's eyes came again the expression of infantile wonder. Were they joking with him, these people? He knew that he was ill, that he had been ill for many months, that he could not remember things . . . but was it delirium that made him feel the growing heat of the air, the pungent smell rising? delirium that conjured the smoke, ascending in clouds to deepen the twilight in the factory? Had he dreamed the danger, was he safe, would he awake with his head on a soft pillow and the sun coming through the window? He looked about for confirmation of his sanity and saw Klaus, kneeling by one of the bodies and repeating, now plaintively and now with smothered ferocity: "You were up here. What have they done with my mother? Tell me, you, or I'll——!"

Kudrnac smiled and then laughed. Sanity? There was no such thing as sanity! Life—he had taken all these years to realize it—was a series of ludicrous sensations, causeless actions, farcical interplay of meaningless motion and senseless speeches. He shouted: "You're right, Gustav! There's no fire, we've all imagined it! We can imagine anything."

He ran to Berta, caught her round the waist and danced her, struggling, round the floor. He whistled. He screamed and shouted. He called upon the friends of his youth and childhood to witness, bade them join in the dance, be ready for the feast to follow. And leaving his partner at length he sprang on one of the benches and addressed them.

"Friends, dead and alive! This is our *annus mirabilis*, this is our great day." (The smoke poured up, darkening the windows till they could hardly see him, till only his frantic, gleaming eyes and his waving hands were visible. The smell increased. The heat was suffocating.) "I declare myself. It is I who made this world, I who planned the incredible jest you are now enjoying. Listen! It was to amuse a child, my own child. You did not know that I was a father? I tell you I made it to amuse a child. She sat on my knee, she asked me for a story, a funny story. I made up the funniest story I have ever invented. You are only the people in the story. I said: 'We'll light a fire, with a great smoke, and all the people are to be burned up, while you and I dance and sing. And while we see the people burning——'"

With a crash like thunder the lowest floor gave way, pouring its contents on to the furnace below, which caught them greedily, swallowed them, and reared up, strengthened, to attack the next barricade. Uttering one long scream, which echoed in every corner, Kudrnac leapt from the bench, fell, rose and rushed to the fire-stair door. Before Max could stop him he had flung it open and stood on the threshold. Immediately he fell back with two bullets in his chest.

"Shut that door!" Gustav shouted.

"And I wish to God," Max said savagely, with his eyes on Klaus, "that that other maniac would do the same." With his foot he hooked Kudrnac's legs out of the way and slammed the door. "Devils!" he said hoarsely. "Devils!"

Suddenly loosed from her torpor, Berta was beside him, tightly holding his arm. "What did you say?" she demanded. "What did you tell Klaus to do? If you——"

"You three!" Gustav called, "go up to the top floor. Take these rifles. Stay there as long as you can. Don't open the door till you're screened. Max, see to it."

The words came as if from a phonograph, in a voice without inflexion, unaccompanied by gesture. They obeyed him. He remained at the window, kneeling on the bench with one leg up, the gun projected through a glassless square in the frame, his body hidden by the wall. He'd wait. They'd learn something. He still had something to teach them. Kudrnac—it was like strangling a baby.

He turned for an instant to look at Kudrnac, who lay on his back with his eyes open; and, prompted by sudden curiosity went over to examine him more closely. Yes, a baby's face. He'd seen a lot like that, young officers of good families. He gave Kudrnac a friendly prod with his foot. "I liked you, old man, for all you were nine parts crazy," he said; and went back to the window.

Almost too late. As the smoke cleared for an instant he saw four men, deployed in the open space, advancing cautiously. The next moment they were hidden, and he waited, praying for the smoke to clear again. The noise beneath and the oven-hot air told him that it was his last chance to give that final lesson. At last. They were still there, standing quite still with rifles ready, looking upwards, attempting no concealment. "Like Kudrnac," Gustav thought, "and he hadn't even a rifle." He sighted the gun a little to the left of the left-hand man, and with finger pressing the trigger swung the handles slowly leftward. "There!" he grunted. "There! you swine!"

Another lot might try. He moved the gun to the next window, mounted it, and still waited.

As yet the second floor was holding, but it would not last long. Savage at its resistance, impatient for an open chimney through which its flames could leap towards the sky, the fire burnt everything that stood within reach of its fury, swallowed a pile of laths as if they were wax tapers, consumed every piece of wood in the framework, blackened the resisting walls, seized and twisted strips of metal, bent and broke the iron casing of the windows. For a brief interval it was checked, suffocated by its own fumes, crushed by the weight of debris which fell upon it; and as it waited, sullen in imprisonment, it belched black smoke, shot momentarily with waving flame, through every window. But the flames were not long in finding a way through the encumbering litter of ash and cinder. The flood of smoke that pressed out through the south-side windows was stemmed by a new inrush of air; the flames leapt, joined, and soared together in a torch of yellow and crimson so fierce and inflexible that it bored through the timber above and in its first upward thrust set alight the benches, the frames and trestles, on the ground it had newly conquered. The hole widened, the boards shrivelling as the torch touched them, and one upon the other benches crashed into the heart of the furnace below. As if in boisterous triumph new flames, superfluous to the task of destroying, trickled through the windows and waved like ribbons in the midst of the smoke outside, touched the surface of the walls with a scorching breath, quivered and faded to nothing. In successive clouds, alternately grey and umber, luminous, the smoke ascended

to form a leaning pillar, the summit efflorescing in a puffy stain across the low sky. On the nearest houses a black powder fell thickly. The smeech carried into streets more than two furlongs away.

About ninety seconds, Max thought. By the sudden increase of the heat and the growing roar of the fire's approach, he knew that the second floor had gone. In about ninety seconds, he thought, the temperature of the air would be beyond human endurance, if he were not already suffocated by the smoke. For five of those seconds he stood idle, beseeching Jehovah that the end might come quickly; and then, unable to resist the urge to struggle, ran to the window where he could breathe more easily. He looked down at the fire-staircase, sheathed in smoke. Too late now. A few steps down, and the iron would burn through the soles of his boots. Something caught his eye and gave him inspiration. A few yards along, projecting over the canal, a lucum. He drew a deep breath, filled his chest with the diluted smoke from outside; ran, stumbling over Schlunge's body which lay in the way, saw the locked door which shut off the lucum and threw his weight against it. He called: "Klaus, help me!" and Klaus, scourged to human intelligence by the last desperation, came stumbling and choking out of the shadows. They assaulted the door together. The lock gave and it fell open.

One side of the trap had gone, rotted away, leaving a hole through which the smoke rose steadily.

"Where's Berta?"

They found her lying on the floor a few yards away, half-unconscious. Max stooped, seized her by the arms, and dragged her to the lucum. "You hold her, Klaus!" He reached up for the end of the chain, which hung, rusting but intact; tugged, and it ran stiffly over its pulleys. "Here!" He slipped the end round Berta's waist, round again, under her armpits, caught the hook through two links. She opened her eyes and asked: "Is it all over?" "Pull yourself together!" Max said. "When you get to the ground lie down flat." He pushed her roughly away from him, towards the hole, and as she fell caught hold of the up-running chain. She screamed. He called: "Shut up! You're all right!" Letting the chain run rapidly between his hands, he watched her disappear into the smoke; felt the chain slacken, and thought he heard a splash. He pulled sharply and felt resistance. "Unhook it!" he bellowed, sobbing. Either she heard him or her wits still worked for her. In another second the chain was loose. Mechanically he pulled again, catching the chain high and drawing it down with a sweep of his arms, letting it fall in coils at his feet.

Klaus watched him as a child watches a conjurer, dumb and

uncomprehending. He would have helped had he known what to do. He was breathing more easily, for through the broken sides of the lucum some fresh air came to dilute the smoke, and though it was hot it was not so scorching as the air inside. He felt that he was awaking from a nightmare, the odour of which still remained in the stench of burning and in Max's face, contorted, red and black, streaked with running sweat. He looked round for Berta, not believing that she had really been plunged into the smoke; and turned again to see Max furiously tugging on the chain. Max, he knew him. He had known him a long time. When this cleared away, the smoke and heat, the livid darkness, the roar below, he would ask him. . . . He felt Max's arms round him, felt the chain tighten on his waist, saw Max's black hand fastening. Terrified, he shouted: "You're not going to—me—through that hole!" But Max had got him by the arms. "She can have him," Max thought, "I don't want him." (But he wanted him. He wanted both of them.) "Let go my clothes! Yes, that's where you're going, you damned fool. Get your legs in, blast you! There!" With a final thrust he got the whimpering, struggling boy through the hole. A hand still clutched the boards and he stamped on the fingers sharply. It left go and the chain began to run out, had run a dozen feet before he could throw himself upon the up-running length, which, as he caught it in his arms, jerked him off his feet. As his shoulders fell back his legs rose and his knees came forcibly against the pulley-block. Suspended there he let the chain slip, tearing his shirt and scorching his hands, till it slacked suddenly and he fell to the floor.

As he got up, dazed and trembling, he heard a cry behind him. Through the smoke Gustav staggered, blindly, his clothes and hair scorched, his face distorted. With one eye half-open he saw Max leaning against the wall, lurched forward, and fell at his feet. As he lay face downward, twisting, his hand crept to his trouser pocket, and came out grasping his revolver.

"Max," he groaned, "be a good chap, Max."

Max took the revolver, hesitated. He wished that someone else . . . Gustav. . . . He knelt down, aimed carefully, and fired. Gustav whispered: "Thanks, Max." He fired twice more.

There was one cartridge left. He stood up still holding the revolver, leant against the wall, and turned the barrel to point at his heart. But his finger would not pull the trigger. Only one—not enough. Not enough to be quick.

He was still alive, two minutes, perhaps four, after the time he had fixed for his certain end; his own survivor. He could still use his limbs, still breathe the smoke-packed air, still see, a yard or more,

with his stinging eyes. At that moment he felt that in his life he had breathed no other air, had not been free from devouring pain, could exist, could go on existing, with his body tortured and his spirit waiting for extinction. Detached from his physical agony he felt himself immortal, longed, with a final uprush of fierce desire, to taste again the life of yesterday that he had forgotten. He dropped the pistol and groped along the floor, feeling his way between wall and benches, breathing alternately through mouth and nose so that the air seared first his throat and then his nostrils. Near the first window he collapsed, overcome by dizziness, and for a few seconds passed from consciousness into a tunnel of oblivion. Below him a tongue of flame had crept up by itself, strengthened on a pile of dry litter and guided by the woodwork on the wall. Eagerly it licked the floorboards, and finding a hole where the wood had rotted, pricked through it into the soft flesh above. The sharp stab of pain pierced to Max's consciousness, drove his muscles to action before he had regained his senses. He became aware that he was crawling forward on hands and knees along the hot boards, close to the wall, sightless, guided only by his sense of touch. Another crash, followed by a roar as the fire came up in one stride, accepting without check the new load of fuel that tumbled into its arms, awoke him to full realization. He opened his eyes, saw the fire behind him, advancing, saw that the factory had become a blazing candle. Terror, the unique, unimagined terror of red flame, awoke a Samson in him. He got to his feet, dived forward, found his hand on a door-latch, pulled it; and ran out to meet the sea of smoke that rolled inwards. He knew where he was—at the top of the fire-staircase. He felt his way to the edge, clutched the railing. Below him he could see nothing but the curling smoke. The bottom of the staircase had gone, probably, shrivelled to nothing. But he would go down, as far as he could, till the iron burnt his feet, then jump. The air was easier to breathe here; he felt reason returning. He had been a fool not to try before. He started to go down. He had been a fool. He had been a fool. His body was all burnt, shrivelled, but he could get down. He had been a fool. Holding the railing he went down slowly, his eyes shut, feeling for each step with his foot.

All alone at the window, with his rifle propped on the sill, Engelhardt sat and yawned and gazed placidly at the spectacle of an ancient factory building burning. He had seen other buildings alight, not so long before as to be dim in his memory; never, perhaps, quite so much smoke as rose from this one. The left side, as he saw it, was not burning at all, only smoking a little. The right side was going beautifully. It was some time since he had last heard, or thought

he heard, the Maxims. The affair was probably over now. He had had no part in it, but was not particularly disappointed. He had an idea that he ought to go back and report now, but he had received no orders. Probably they had forgotten about him, as they had forgotten this morning, and found suddenly that there were no men left for him to look after, and sent him off to sit by himself at a window. Still, he had had no orders, they couldn't blame him.

A cloud of smoke rose suddenly and covered the fire-staircase which he had been watching. It was curious, he thought, the way the smoke seemed to shoot upwards and then come to a halt and lie almost still in a cloud that swelled like a toy balloon. This one was rather like an old woman with a full brown skirt, tight at the ankles. He watched it with interest, until a gust of wind suddenly blew it away. He could see the staircase again, dimly, for the sky was very dark. And surely there was someone on it, a man, or something very much like a man, actually walking down the steps. One of the ruffians! He had been inside all the time—it was scarcely believable! Engelhardt raised his rifle and took aim. A difficult shot, he thought, fumbling with the rear-sight. Quick! another cloud was rising. He fired, and the man threw up his arms and toppled over. Engelhardt sighed—a sportsman's sigh of satisfaction.

As darkness fell the rain began; not with a few big drops or with a sudden cloudburst but in a sheet of drizzle that seemed not to fall but to be created out of the hot, oppressive air. The houses by the side of the canal, already dimmed by the failing daylight, were finally blurred to invisibility by rain, which fell upon them vertically, making a continuous whisper on the canal's smooth surface. The factory itself was hardly visible, had become a precipitous cliff, the summit blurred by smoke, the base by rain and shadow; and as if the fire had spent itself in the last flaming assault upon the sky it seemed to yield now, exhausted, to the composed counter-attack of the rain, so that the smoke, which had mounted to the clouds in a leaning pillar, toppled at the onset of a high breeze, writhed, dwindled and grew fainter in colour, till it almost matched the stone of the sky behind. A long way off, behind the hills, thunder rumbled.

Hardly aware that the rain was soaking him, for it was only one more discomfort, Markfort still leant against the wall of the bridge, motionless, his body and brain numbed by hours of inaction. Since the hasty ill-cooked meal in the early hours of morning he had eaten nothing but a small bar of French chocolate, had drunk nothing at all. He had seen the play as a child sees it, sitting on a low seat at

the back of the pit; hearing the thunder, seeing the flashes of lightning, knowing only by uncomprehended noises that there are actors on the stage. It seemed to be over now. In the end they had burnt out the nest, and he by some hidden compulsion had been forced to stand by all day, in attendance in a lane nearby, to be a distant witness of the brave affair and to swat such wasps as might, escaping, come his way. He must continue to stand in attendance until orders came. Lagenpusch, probably, had already motored back to Headquarters and was even now writing a stirring report, full of pregnant modesty, about the successful action. But it would not do to lose a solitary insect that might roll, with singed wings, out of the ashes. So Markfort must stay, must go on watching till he watched blank darkness, must keep his rifle ready and perhaps, when he could no longer see as far as the surface of the canal, should fire a few prudent shots into the water for a fugitive who might be getting clear by swimming.

A few feet away, side by side on the towpath, two of his men were standing; talking in whispers as if they assisted at a burglary. For an hour they had talked thus, their voices rising from time to time in a Saxon gurgle, and never a word of their intercourse had distinctly reached him. He wondered vaguely, and with some irritation, how men so simple could find subject for so much conversation.

Mercifully he was growing sleepy, and his slackening senses transmitted less keenly the odours of the canal, the swash of the men's tongues. His vision was stilled, sounds were becoming rhythmic; the murmur below, rising and falling, the steady hiss of the rain on the water. The dimming of the hard objects he had watched all day was a relief to his sensibility, and he could almost accept the scene as the work of an artist, like the sketches for autumnal paintings that had once pleased him as he rolled up the dust-blinds in a Munich gallery. The pain that he still felt chiefly was a pain of the spirit, a spiritual sickness engendered by the day's remotely acted drama, a sense, not new to him, of the prolonged and futile suffering of animate beings. *Ekelhaft*. That was the word Beuloh used for it. Well, there it was! He had had four years to cure it—it was cured, for every practical purpose. But it was still there, like a cicatrice owned from birth, neatly skinned over but ready to smart in certain weathers.

For fifty yards he could still distinguish the sides of the canal, and the outlines of the hulks that lay moored to the bank. Beyond that, all was a confusion of shadow, varnished by the vertical strokes of rain. But he thought now that he could detect motion, some

motion apart from the close-weaved water-threads that ran down like an endless band. In that patch of deeper shadow which he knew, by its direction, was the place where the canal bent slightly in its course, he thought that something had shifted. A beam, perhaps, had fallen from the wrecked factory into the water, and was sending out widening ripples. Or a bird, thinking that the alarm was over, might have returned and alighted at the water's edge, for birds made nests even in such dreary places. But he fancied that something was moving towards him.

The possibility acted as an irritant upon his attention, and rousing himself from his lethargy he called to the two men: "Tenzer! here! and you, Gohlisch!"

They sprang to attention and ran towards him.

"There's something—" he said, and stopped. Then. "You, Gohlisch, find Captain Beuloh and ask if he has any new instructions. Ask him if he has any news for me. You'd better go by the street—you'd only fall into the canal."

The man saluted and went off.

"And you, Tenzer, you're to go right along the Blücherstrasse and see if any of the men have anything to report. Double!"

He watched till Tenzer was out of sight, and then turned again towards the river. He was right. Something was moving towards him, very slowly. A small boat. No, a punt of sorts, a ferry punt most likely, awkwardly paddled by a small figure crouching in the stern. Remembering that his body was an easy mark, projected above the curved line of the bridge, he stooped quickly and ran down to the towpath. In the angle between two cottages that stood against the path he stood watching, invisible. It was some time, a full minute, he guessed, before the punt came into his field of vision. It was swinging badly, zig-zagging from side to side of the canal. He watched its progress intently, trying to see the cargo, but could distinguish only a featureless bundle in the bows. Then, as it came level with him, he saw that a girl was paddling, using what looked like a child's wooden spade.

Somehow the crazily-driven craft got through the arch, its low side board scraping with a hideous noise against the stone. Markfort crept back to the top of the bridge, waited stooping for half a minute, and then peered over the farther side. The girl was getting the hang of her work, and the punt was making better progress. He watched it, smiling faintly, until it was lost among the distant shadows.

X

"But we gave them a good meal last night," Käte protested, "and they've had a comfortable night—clean straw to sleep on, a warm blanket. We're not a hospital. If you encourage beggars——"

"They must have something," he repeated. And dropping his voice, looking at her with the shy look in his big eyes that he had kept since his courting days: "After all, Käte, they've come far, if they speak the truth, and they may have far to go. It's a long road," he added sentimentally, thinking of the sixty years he had trodden it, "and we all need a helping hand, sometimes."

He had risen as he was speaking and backed towards the wall, with a plate of porridge in his hands.

"It may be that they won't take it," he said, as he sidled through the door.

"And I don't believe they're brother and sister, either," she called after him as the door closed.

He went down the flagged passage and out through the kitchen. They were on his mind, these two queer visitors. He had puzzled about them as he lay trying to go to sleep, unable to place them. Beggars he was used to, and tourists too, in the days before the war, asking permission to camp in a corner of the meadow. But these were neither; not ordinary beggars and too ragged for tourists. They didn't fit. The girl might be anyone. The youth was of good family, to judge by his nose and his speech, his quiet, unbeggarly way of accepting a kindness. They might answer a few questions, now that they were less fatigued. He could begin by talking about places nearby, places they could reach in a good day's walking. Then, if they responded . . .

He knocked twice on the stable door, and receiving no answer went inside. The stable was empty. He looked round quickly to see what they had taken, but nothing was missing. Even the blanket was there, neatly folded.

It was the eighteenth day of their march; clear, fine and sharpened by a northerly breeze which broke the heat of the sunshine. And

Klaus, whose spirits had risen with each day's advance, actually whistled as he walked.

They had risen and started out early, almost at dawn, though Berta protested.

"I'm tired, Klaus," she said. "It's comfortable here. The farmer's kind, he'll give us more food, perhaps."

But he was on his feet already and stretching his arms above his head to break the last cords of drowsiness. He was lean and mountain-tall as she looked up at him, her head still resting on the straw; lean and eager. His face was still pallid, his eyes tired. But the set of his shoulders was tauter and more muscular, his thin body all muscle and sinew, lacking nothing but flesh to make it a man's body. His eyes roved no longer, but looked straight to the far distance, shining a little, faintly hinting purpose.

"We must get on," he said.

But where to? she wondered. To another village, where they might find kindness, or where they might, at the end of an exhausting day, have to face the tiring and alarming business of stealing food. And then on again, an endless, fruitless march.

"We're not safe here," he muttered. "We're not far enough off. The man might say something about us; he might telegraph to Birnewald."

Birnewald! If only he would forget, as she was forgetting it! And how much did he remember? He spoke of it not in relation to particular events—to his flogging in the Engineers' Gymnasium, to the smoke rising up through the floor in the piano-factory; only as a place of terror, a place where they were known and watched, an enemy city. Yet he remembered something, and he startled her sometimes by his allusions, making her think for a moment that he had passed those days in full consciousness. "That would amuse Max." "He is like our Gustav, but a little taller." And those were things that she did not care to remember.

"It's comfortable here," she said again, pleading with him. But he would not let her stay. She had nursed him too well, and his will was no longer weak enough for her to govern.

There were things about that they could have taken and might have sold for something, pieces of harness, gardening tools. But he forbade her to take them. And instead of wrapping the blanket about her shoulders, as she would have liked to do, for the sun was not high yet, and the dress Frau Oberschmidt had given her was a thin one, she folded it as he directed.

He glanced from side to side as they walked, and sniffed with appreciation. They were out of the forest now, and before them,

unbroken, lay the pasture country. The road was easy, undulating gently across country which rose only at the far extremities to the height of hills. Country like that which he had wanted to cross in days gone by. They had passed, an hour after starting, a signpost that said eighteen kilometres to Brückenschutt, and that was good enough objective. They walked at a steady pace, in step, for he had learned to shorten his strides and she to lengthen hers. With the few biscuits left over from those they had got at Mohrenheim they had broken their fast, and that would last them at least till midday. So, with a good night's rest behind them, they would cover fair ground that day. They would reach Brückenschutt early, and if they found food there might make the same distance afterwards, or very nearly. So Klaus thought, in so far as he made any plans; and with that much settled he was content to enjoy the exercise, for which his appetite was not easily satisfied, and the tingle of the cool wind on his skin, and the smell of damp soil warmed by sunshine. He whistled, surprising Berta with an art she did not know he possessed, and smiled at the sight of a bird chasing another with a sprig in its beak, and quickened his pace, relishing the feel of the road beneath his soles, till she could only keep up with him by making little runs at every few yards.

Since they had left the stable neither had spoken; for they spoke little at any time, and scarcely at all when they were walking. They walked close together, only so far apart that their swinging arms would not strike each other. It was he who set the pace, as it was he, now, who fixed a mark for the morning's walking and planned the simple campaigns for food and shelter; and he walked as if walking alone, his eyes generally upon the road in front, and his gaze passing over her head when he looked to the left. But if he was often unaware of her presence, she never lost consciousness of his. Her face, like his face, was pointed forward, but her eyes, several times in every kilometre, turned to glance up at him, as instinctively as they closed in the act of blinking. And occasionally she raised her right hand to touch his arm gently, as if her sight needed help from another sense to confirm his living presence. He had grown. His strength was great enough now to carry him right beyond her reach. And she needed that much of reassurance.

The country was still and serene. There were women at work in the fields, and they passed a man ditching. But the road was empty, except for a car, which had started early from Brückenschutt and rattled by on its way to Zweikirchen, a dungcart driven by a small, bald boy who appeared to be asleep, and an aged tramp who stopped when he had passed to turn and stare at them. Klaus ignored

him, appeared not to see the cart, and would not have gone to the side of the road to let the car pass if Berta had not dragged him by the arm. He could see only distant objects, the yellow-green of the wolds in front, the grey of distant hills. His vague eyes were happy, he whistled more loudly. And suddenly he began talking.

"I'm not going back," he said, "not back, however much they want me. I like to be where there are no walls."

She murmured something in response, but he did not seem to be addressing her. He started to whistle again, and broke off in the middle of a phrase.

"Berlin's nice," he continued. "But I shan't go back there either. We had a lovely garden, but I don't remember it very well. If you go back you have to go through all the other places, back through the railway tunnel, through the Abbey. I'd rather go straight on."

"The Abbey?" she asked. "Where is the Abbey?"

"You must know," he answered, rather irritably. "That was where Max—you remember. You must remember. I used to look after the car for Brother Lucius. I remember seeing you there, when we read Milton. You remember how angry Max was. I'd go back if Father told me, but not unless. Unless Mother——"

He stopped abruptly. Then:

"I ought to find her," he said. "Someone must know where she is. Gustav might know. I know she wasn't burnt, because she'd gone before the fire started. I couldn't find her anywhere. Do you think, if I asked the police——?"

"No, not the police!" she said firmly.

He was silent, surprised at the abruptness of her answer, and she took advantage of the silence.

"You can leave it to me," she said. "I'll find her for you in time——"

"Find who?"

But she went on: "You know, I always find things for you. You had lost your boot that night, don't you remember—you had left it in the boat. I found a new one for you."

She looked up, questioning, but he did not remember. She had rashly invited him to return where he would see only vague objects between the mist and shadows. He had felt himself slipping and scrambled back. But she would have liked to go back, for he had been nearer then, and she would have faced again the anxious watching and sleepless labour to regain that closeness. She would almost

have gone back further, to the moments that she herself remembered only dreamily, the smoke burning her throat, Max coming towards her, running, right out of the fire, the sense of falling, with something tight and painful round her waist. For that had been only just before the awakening, when she had found Klaus lying on the gravel, his eyes closed and his face white as parchment, as she had seen him once before; and that had been a blessed moment. But he was well now, and he would not follow her.

"I always find things for you," she repeated. "You couldn't do without me, could you, Klaus? I got you well again. You couldn't do without me, could you?"

But he did not answer. He had left off whistling, and with renewed determination was walking, his chin high, his eyes on the next bend of the road, his ragged coat unbuttoned and pulled by the wind.

So they walked on, he steadfast, she gallantly keeping to his pace, and as the sun grew hotter the kilometres slipped rapidly behind them. A little before midday they reached Brückenschutt, where a woman gave them beer in a jam jar, and where they took a loaf from a baker's cart. It was a quiet town, built on two sides of a stream, with many trees in the streets, with a big monument in the market place, a square stone Rathaus, rather larger than the neighbouring square stone houses, and other signs of a village's municipal pretentiousness. For all its stillness, it had not passed through the war unknowingly, for there was still a sprinkling of military notices about the houses, attached even to the trees, and there were marks on the narrow bridge where the wheels of military lorries had chipped the stone. To Berta it was magical, a place so small and clean, without the stale smell of a town or the alarming houselessness of the countryside, a village made for the holidays of grand people. She wanted to explore the little streets, to sit near the bridge and watch the quaint country vehicles which occasionally crossed it, a farmer's wagon, blue and red beneath the mud, a smart gig driven by an old lady in a green shawl. But Klaus, with the loaf tucked under his jacket, went straight on, over the bridge and past the crossroads, and they did not speak again till the last houses were out of sight. Then she said:

"I'm hungry, Klaus."

He looked round to see that no one was in sight, took out the loaf and broke it in half.

"Can't we sit down to eat it?" she asked.

He said: "No. Not here. We're too near the town. Besides, we must get on."

But when they had gone a little farther, eating as they walked, she begged again for a short respite, and he sat down on a tree-trunk and watched her impatiently as she lay full length in the grass.

"We must get on," he said presently, his eyes fixed hungrily on the road ahead, and she got up obediently, with a little groan for the stiffness of her legs. "We must walk faster," he said, and when she asked him: "Why?" he did not answer.

They had covered ten more kilometres, at a fair pace, before they stopped again. And here Klaus himself, having found a patch of grass away from the road where a clump of trees gave protection, lay down and fell asleep. When Berta woke he was still sleeping, but a twig falling on his face presently roused him, and he got up at once, not realizing, it appeared, that he had slept so long. When they took the road again the sun, falling lower to the left, was in their eyes. But it was not brilliant enough to give them great discomfort—it was pleasanter to walk now that the heat was not so great. They walked more slowly and dreamily, seeing the country to their left as a shadow against the sun's light, to the right the fields and trees sharp and golden. They were passing cottages, a few together, and a mile farther on a solitary house, tall and narrow, shuttered and marked for sale. From there the road was featureless, the telegraph poles having left to cut across country, the trees standing back to mark the boundary of the adjacent meadows. They came to an avenue, where the sun flashed at them from behind the trees, and then the road ran on unbroken as far as they could see. It climbed gently and at its highest point bent a little to the right, and ran on then, downwards, straight and unshaded until the sides met, so that nothing had been accomplished and there was no excuse for stopping.

"I'm tired, Klaus," she said at length. "My foot's sore. Couldn't we stop here?"

"It may rain," he said, calmly and practically. "There are clouds over there, where the wind's coming from. We ought to get shelter for the night if we can."

"It's ever so far to the nearest place," she argued, "I saw it on a signpost, just before those trees. Twelve kilometres."

"Twelve's nothing," he said, "and there may be a farm before that. Farmers are nice, as a rule. And it won't be dark yet, not for a long time."

But a mile farther on he slackened his pace and gave her his arm, to take the weight off her sore foot. And when she began to cry, her mouth shut so that the sobs escaped only

through her nose in little sniffs, he stopped dead and looked down at her.

He asked clumsily: "Is your foot hurting? Will you have to rest?"

She could not answer, for she was crying now without restraint, and he held her by the arms and stared at her, wondering why she did not look up at him.

"You're tired," he said woodenly.

He waited till she had stopped crying, and then made her climb, protesting, on to his back. She was light enough, he thought, and he went on, slowly, but at an even pace.

Her weight was sufficient to make him realize that his own legs were not unlimited in their power; but the road was easy, there was time enough before nightfall, no need to make this the end of the day's journey. A shape on the horizon became as it approached a labourer on a bicycle. He stopped, got off his machine, and asked if he could help them. "We're all right, thank you," Klaus said. He gave a jerk to get Berta's thighs on to his hips again and walked on steadily. The peasant, leaning on his bicycle in the middle of the road, watched them, murmuring "Das ist ja sehr komisch," until they were out of sight.

It was nine kilometres to Schaubendorf. He had got Berta comfortably fixed now. She had stopped sobbing, and her head rested between her arm and his check. She was drowsy and content. Soon, despite the rough motion of his gait, she fell asleep. Nine kilometres, less, eight and a half. He would make it, he thought. But he had covered less than three when he sank down on the grass at the road-side, utterly exhausted. They slept where they were, side by side, and though the cold woke them early they were spared the rain.

Very slowly, stiff and weak with hunger, they made their way next day to Schaubendorf. They were lucky there, and rested for a day, despite Klaus's impatience. And a fortnight later, travelling slowly, they saw the sea.

At Peterhaven the *Arnhem* was unloading sugar. An event, for a ship of that tonnage had not been seen in the tiny harbour for five years or more. Otto Kestel, one-armed, formerly of the navy, supervised the work with a smile half good-natured and half contemptuous. It was small beer for him, little trips up and down the

coast, from Rotterdam to Bremerhaven, occasionally to London, sometimes, but very rarely, to one of the Baltic ports. Still, it brought him a living.

On landing at Peterhaven he had noticed among the gaping fishermen a tall youth who looked strong and appeared to be hungry. He picked him out, beckoning with a jerk of his head, and rather to his surprise the boy addressed him in English.

"Do you want me?"

"Ja! But why do you speak English? You're not English, are you?"

"No. But I thought you were."

Kestel looked at him with faint amusement.

"No. I'm Dutch. Where did you learn English? At school?"

"At the Abbey."

"The Abbey?"

Well, the boy was rather simple, he had a trace of the idiot in his eyes. But he didn't look incapable, not for ordinary work. At least he had not the round, blank face of most of the Hanoverian peasants who seemed to make up the population of the harbour village. Kestel was rather tender towards boys of that age (eighteen, he guessed, but could not be certain) for it was on his nineteenth birthday that Johann had started on the voyage to Java from which he had not returned.

"Do you want a job?"

"Yes."

"Could you do with a meal?"

"Yes."

"You'd better come along with me. I may be able to find you something. And then you've got to work like a stoker."

So Klaus was fed, and afterwards, naïvely grateful, he worked as the mate directed, with eager energy. He returned to Berta that evening very happy. He had been given two meals, had enjoyed the new sensation of productive physical labour. Kestel had shown him over the *Arnhem*, his own cabin, the galleys, the engines, the men's quarters in the forecastle; and had finally paid him—small wages, indeed, but fair enough, with the food added—and they were the first coins Klaus had handled for over a week.

He shouted, when he saw Berta: "Wages! I'm a paid man!" And she, catching his excitement, ran out to greet him clad only in a man's overcoat borrowed from Herr Mayer, for she had been washing all her clothes in the rain-water butt.

The sight of Klaus, radiant and sweating, lifted her to a peak of happiness. Her instinct for domesticity, surviving from forgotten

years, had demanded that Klaus should labour, should sweat and earn money for her. And now that desire was fulfilled. The good news came to accompany her relief, for when he left her to stroll by himself she was never certain that his varying wits would bring him back. At last he had work, interest, a place to go to. He was tired now, and would not talk much. But when they had had a meal—he had brought two mackerel, and Herr Mayer had provided a loaf—they would sit together, close together when it grew chilly, and she would gradually drag out of him what he had been doing.

They had been in their home for a whole week, and felt that it was permanent. True, Herr Mayer had only said (with a pretence of grudging it) that they could sleep in his toolshed for a night, if, as they said, they were brother and sister; well, yes, they could stay for two or three days if they paid him by repairing and painting the place. There was plenty of wood about, and a box of nails on the window-sill; a hammer somewhere, in the wheelbarrow he thought, and he would get a tin of paint to-morrow. They must not expect food. No, he never gave away food. He repeated that statement loudly and ferociously, hoping that his neighbours would overhear, since they constantly twitted and upbraided him for his foolish acquiescence to the demands of beggars. But in the days that followed he could never ask God's blessing on his lonely meal without stealing out, glancing every way, and putting down a loaf, or a bowl of *sauerkraut* with two spoons, or half a sausage, outside the toolhouse. He was a Moravian, an old man with a tiny body and a big round head decorated with pince-nez and a white wisp of beard; less than five feet in height, and with the head removed he would have weighed less than thirty kilograms. He told them that they must move on directly the painting was finished. But a smile had escaped even as he pronounced that ultimatum, and it was two days now since they had finished the painting, and the loaves still appeared. "It is on my conscience," he said severely to Frau Rausnitz, "I do not feel certain that they are brother and sister as they say. But how is one to know? What should a Christian do?" Frau Rausnitz, too, was uncertain, and said that she was uncertain. But she watched the pair from her back door with interest, called a soft "good-morning" every day; found constantly (to the surprise of Fräulein Grabou, her companion) that the milk had turned and might as well be given away; and willingly lent the girl—poor, queer, frail thing!—a piece of soap for washing.

So they were settled now, Berta thought, and only rarely, when Klaus had been out for some time and she was anxious, had a moment of depression made her worry about the future. Had they

hunted all through Germany they could not, she believed, have found a place more to her liking. A town of little houses built shortly before the war, square and ugly, but separated by gardens where flowers and weeds fought for possession, where sunflowers sprang up from the middle of the cabbage plots, where pots and broken cucumber-frames lay untidily on all the paths, and the grass and the convolvulus covered everything. The road itself, once cindered, had tufts of grass all over it, and the railway lines which ran along it, curving at the far end to come level with the quay, were almost invisible beneath grass and the leaves of dandelions. A ramshackle, sleepy place, which men had tried to make into a city and had, with a shrug of their shoulders, offered back to nature. Dead, and lying against a dead harbour, which the big waves could not and the big ships seldom wanted to invade. Owned by the fishermen, whose fathers had lived there, and by gentlefolk broken in fortune who in 1916 had found houses going for the price of a Louis XVI workbox; good-natured people, generous of their small possessions, simple in their forms of worship and their manners. A proper place, Berta thought, for the end of a journey—and surely the journey was finished; surely, now that Klaus had work to do, could use his strong arms, and make money enough in time to buy the toolshed or even a room in the house from benevolent Herr Mayer.

"It's nice here, Klaus," she said. "We needn't walk any more, need we? The people are all nice, and there's sun all over the houses. We're going to stay here, aren't we?"

"The houses are ugly," he said, "and everything's falling to pieces. Still——"

It was enough foundation, that "still——" for the hope that built itself up in her so easily.

"They may turn us out," he added, his face gloomy.

But she could not believe in that bitter possibility.

She was crestfallen when, as they sat on the headland after their supper, he told her that his employment would not last. "It can't take long," he said, "there's a lot of stuff, but several of us on to it." "It's a start," she answered, consoling him and herself. "There'll be other ships coming in. And when they know you they'll find you other jobs on the docks. There must be a lot to be done. You can use your hands as well as any of them—the way you patched up the roof of our house!" But he could not look ahead hopefully, as she did. It was enough for him at that moment that he was tired, his hunger satisfied, and that he was not alone.

The sky, as they watched it, turned from gold to crimson, its

colour reflected in the unbroken water of the harbour below them. There were no clouds, and it would be fine to-morrow. Beyond the straggling houses the low hills were losing their colour, falling asleep. A light showed beyond the harbour, the sky turned to a mysterious green, and presently a star shone. Gingerly using the light wind a fishing boat crept across the harbour and passed out to the open sea, which itself was like a vast haven, undisturbed by waves. There were lights on the *Arnhem* now, and across them they could see men moving. "It's getting cold," Berta said, and they began to walk down the path towards the town, her hand hooked on his hanging arm.

They had three coins, and they would give one to Herr Mayer. Klaus was resolved on this—he had said again and again, as they were eating their supper: "We must give the old man something. We owe him a lot of money." And though she could have used the money better than Herr Mayer she did not protest; it was new to her, such respectability of outlook, and she was surprised to find it in Klaus; but it was a portent (to her who so anxiously sought portents) of his acceptance of Peterhaven. You must be respectable, she supposed, if you wanted to live quietly with a man in a house with a garden; and she thought without displeasure of seeing him in clean, unpatched clothes.

If it could last! The week that had just passed, a home undisturbed, food, no walking. It was good for Klaus, as well as for her. He had talked to Herr Mayer, not easily, but using words that she had never heard, and had seemed to find pleasure in the conversation. He had dug up one of the beds in the garden, and with that bout of labour his restlessness had been diminished. She had cut his hair, and with a safety razor found in the toolshed he had shaved himself. Every evening they had sat near the sea, and not once had he jumped up, as in the days of their march, to push on furiously. He had ceased to glance sharply over his shoulder as if always afraid that he was followed. The sea, which he had hailed with a child's joy as they first saw it, seemed to have marked the limit of their journey and the end of his *wanderlust*. This was a place that she could not have imagined, a life of which she had hardly foreseen the possibility. With the gardens and the sunlight, with the people's slow deep voices, a dream was fulfilled that she had never dreamed.

"I'm going down to see the ship," he said when they reached the door of their shelter. "I want to see it with the lights all burning."

"I'll come with you," she said.

"No," he answered. "You're tired, aren't you? And you said you were cold. You'd better go in and go to sleep."

But she would not let him go alone.

Kestel was glad when a telegram came with new orders. He had had enough of Peterhaven. A good enough place for the old creaks and the simple-minded fishermen—and they were kindly people, he granted—but another day of those lifeless streets and tawdry buildings would have turned his reason. Not a shop worth the name, not a picture-house, not even a man who could tell a good story in the beershop.

He looked up and saw Thomas staring at the back of the telegram, agog for the news.

He said: "To-night, thank God!"

The arrival of the *Arnhem* had caused hardly less stir in Peterhaven than was occasioned when Franz Eberlein appeared in person to have a word with Kestel and to open one of the cases that had just been placed on the last lorry. Peterhaven did not see many gentlemen nowadays in spatterdash gaiters and riding in a big saloon car. He was the travelling partner in the Kolonialwaren A.G. von Hannover, the brains of the business, they said; went everywhere, made money in every season and through all crises. He had been in Peterbrücke, where he had three large customers, and having time to spare had decided to see a sample of the consignment his firm had ordered. The journey would take him less than half an hour in his car. He was an elderly man, of small, sharply-pointed features, incisive in his speech, jerky and masterful in his actions. Had he chanced to pick a bad case from the bulk he would have had all the others opened.

The case he sampled was, however, satisfactory—as he had expected, for his firm bought only from the most reliable exporters. And having smoked a cigar with Kestel (who was a dull, slow man, he thought, as all sailors were, particularly Dutch sailors) he found that he had time to look in on Posselt, a direct customer in tea and tobacco, whom he visited only rarely. Posselt's orders had been falling off lately, whereas those of other small customers had been improving just a little in the last three months. Eberlein didn't wonder. What a place! he thought, sprinkling his cigar ash over it; all rotting to bits, half the houses empty, a regular cemetery. A pity. The harbour was all right—he had got that information from

Kestel. The decay must be due to nothing more than the disease of sluggishness, the futile inability to start things, that was scourging the whole country. Currency uncertainty? Nonsense! He could show a profit whatever jugglery the politicians were up to. Later on, when things improved generally, he might step in and buy the whole place up, advertise it in the commercial papers, put up some better houses, shake the wretched townlet into new life. That would upset Posselt, no doubt. Posselt, in the days before the war when the harbour was used regularly by large ships, had watched competitors springing up all round him; and, not long afterwards, had quietly rubbed his hands when he saw them closing down. He was alone again now, sole purveyor of every conceivable utility; a slow business, but sufficiently profitable to supply him with his simple needs. Probably, Eberlein thought with a smile, he was the richest man in Peterhaven. Well, he couldn't go on that way for ever. You could make money before the war by sitting still behind a counter, but nowadays, as Eberlein's countrymen were discovering all too slowly. . . .

"Good afternoon, Herr Posselt!"

"Good afternoon, Herr Eberlein! This is an honour and a pleasure! It must be six months now—or is it a year?—since I last had the pleasure. . . ."

They talked a little of politics, of which Posselt had no grasp, and alluded, but only obliquely, to business. Eberlein was discreetly scanning the shelves to see what was stocked, noting the untidiness and dilapidation of the shop, judging how much could be put down to shortage of ready money and how much to pure laziness. There was no need, he decided, to curtail Posselt's credit allowance, but a reduction in discount on some articles might be salutary. What a heavy-jaw, what a sheep, what a disgusting old commercial parasite! Surely Eberlein had seen cobwebs straining and breaking as the old grocer came forward from among his sacks and cases.

"And what is the local news, Herr Posselt? Things looking up? Summer visitors? New people? You've got some scandal for me, I know! You were always a wit, Herr Posselt. Oh, many's the time my wife and I have laughed over the stories you told me."

Posselt, remembering vaguely (as did Eberlein still more vaguely) that he had once ventured to tell this important Handlungs-direktor friend a story about a hen and a bathtub, became a picture of gloomy solemnity as he racked his brains for some new *jeu d'esprit* to honour his reputation. His forehead was furrowed, his mouth fell open, he gazed with distress at the back of a window-bill advertising soap.

"No, Herr Eberlein," he said at length, "there is very little news. This is not really a summer holiday place, we don't get many visitors. And I'm not sure that we're not as well without them—there was a change I didn't like in the character of the town when we had a lot of ships coming in and casuals about to unload them. A town likes its own people, that's my opinion. And now that they're not using the railway line any more, and there being nothing to see here, except nice people living in a respectable way——"

"Well, well! That's certainly a point of view, Herr Posselt." Eberlein, who saw that there was nothing to be pumped from this man, thought that it was time he got back to Peterbrücke, in the hope of securing an interview with Ewald Kauz before closing time. "Oh, there was one thing I was going to say——"

He noticed suddenly that a customer had come into the shop, and though it was only a ragged girl the instinct born in him in the days before he was an important Herr Direktor made him stand aside.

In the tone of a poor-relief officer addressing a suspicious applicant, Posselt grunted: "Yes?"

The girl bought a thirty-pfennig toothbrush and went away.

"And is that one of the old residents?" Eberlein asked.

"No. I don't know who she is. Been here only a few days. She and a boy. Gypsies, I reckon. I don't like that sort."

"Gypsies? You must be careful, Herr Posselt, who you get into the town. It doesn't do to open your arms to all sorts of strangers. You read in the papers about that place Birnewald? They say that was their trouble. With the country in its present state. . . ."

He was mocking Herr Posselt, and he hardly bothered to hide the little twinkle as he rubbed the old man's cherished susceptibilities. But in another part of his brain different thoughts were passing. The girl. He had watched her face just now, memorizing the features; for it was his habit, engendered by the requirements of his profession, to memorize faces. He had the sensation of having experienced this episode before, having stood aside while a customer was served and noted that very face; and not so long before.

Gradually he remembered. Gimpelfort. Rudolf Felt in the Spenerstrasse, a large buyer of spice and sauces. The same girl, yes, he was almost sure of it. He never made a mistake about

faces. But why did he remember the common incident so vividly? There was something attached to it. The girl hadn't been in the shop more than a minute. On that occasion too she had bought some trifling article—was it a box of matches? Of course! It all came back to him now. She had taken something off the counter, something relatively valuable—what was it?—a silver-plated biscuit barrel, a lottery prize or a ticket gift or something. Rudolf Felt had missed it while he was still in the shop, had run down the street in the hope of catching the thief. There had been some talk—a number of little shop-thefts in the town in the last two days, food and articles of clothing—a girl suspected—several people claiming to have seen her—a paragraph about it in the local paper next day, with a police notice.

Suddenly, so quickly that Herr Posselt was alarmed and embarrassed, Eberlein seized his umbrella and bag and gloves, said a hasty good-day, and walked briskly out of the shop. "Of course," Posselt thought, "with small customers like us they don't have to trouble about politeness. If I was——" But Eberlein, already a hundred yards down the road with his car and chauffeur following him, had forgotten about Posselt. The girl, he was sure it was the same. No business of his. But, yes! it was the business of every good citizen to help in terminating the reign of lawlessness which was making German commerce impossible. And, secretly, Eberlein took a certain pride in his powers of swift observation and memory, his genius (he thought of it now with something approaching awe) for noting the relevant and the useful. Already his name was a byword in and beyond his own business—"A smart young fellow, Eberlein," and later: "a shrewd man Eberlein," and recently: "Herr Eberlein, he's as quick as a cat, he knows everything that's going on; he doesn't miss a chance to get a mark's change out of ninety pfennige." Already his reputation was that of someone mysterious, almost—what was the word?—psychic. And now, if there was a paragraph in the Hanover papers, which the Berlin papers might copy. . . . He became aware as he hurried along the rough footpath, almost running, that his car was just behind, following like a toy dog on a string. "Here, Josef!" His tone gave the impression that Josef was the fool. He sprang into the car, shouting: "Straight on—not too fast—stop at each cross-way!" and sank back, panting. At the first turning he looked to his right, and there was the girl, twenty yards away, walking briskly and swinging her canvas bag. "To the right!" he called through the speaking-tube, "and stop a few yards in front of that girl."

When he jumped out and accosted her he was still breathless and too excited to know what to say. Before he could collect himself he had said: "Excuse me, Madam!" (She was, after all, a customer of a customer, the ultimate consumer. It was she, as he so often told his junior salesmen, who eventually. . . .) His wits, which only violent exercise could scatter, were returning. "I think," he said, and already his voice was hardening, "I think I have seen you before."

She looked at him blankly. Such a respectable gentleman, in spite of the sweat pouring down his face, such good clothes, and the motor and chauffeur. . . .

"In Gimpelfort," he prompted. "Not very long ago——"

To a duller man it would have been plain that the name meant something to her.

"Gimpelfort?" she repeated.

"You left rather suddenly, I think."

"Yes, I——"

She stopped short, confused.

He made a venture—his memory not quite clear about the biscuit-barrel.

"I think that a pair of stockings was missed from one of the shops at that time. I wonder whether——"

But that was enough. His chance shaft had found its mark.

"I think you would be wise to come along with me," he said imperiously. "There are certain questions——"

She glanced over her shoulder, but the intelligent Josef had taken up his position behind her; a young man with long, powerful legs. For a few seconds she protested, pleaded. It was useless. "But they can't prove anything," she thought. Under Eberlein's fierce eye she got into the car.

Josef drove round the block, back to the centre of the town where Posselt's shop was, turned right, changed into top gear, and accelerated along the Peterbrücke road.

Finding the shed empty, Klaus consulted Herr Mayer, who knew nothing, but had an idea that Berta had gone to the shop. He would have detained Klaus, for he had grown increasingly friendly and liked conversation, but Klaus was impatient. He went along the main street dejectedly, upset because his job was finished, and he had expected Berta to be ready to console him. In the shop a number of people—three sailors, a farmer, one or two gentlewomen—were talking eagerly in a group, Posselt joining from behind the counter.

He stood at the door, peering round to make sure that Berta was not there, and suddenly Posselt saw him.

Posselt, raising his voice in unwonted excitement, said: "Hi! look! there!" and as if at a word of command the group turned.

Klaus stood still, startled and perplexed. Two of the men were coming towards him. All at once he suspected hostility, became frightened. He stood for half a second more, trying to say something; found that his tongue was tied, shrank, turned and bolted.

He did not know, running across the cobbles, if they were after him, only feared it. He ran straight for a hundred yards, turned into a narrow street, dodged down a footpath between the houses, ran on, full tilt, and came out on the wharf. The *Arnhem* lay moored fifty yards away. He ran towards her, scanning the decks. There was a man on the bridge looking out towards the other side of the harbour, another in the stern busy with ropes and tackle. The deck amidships was a couple of feet above the level of the quay, and three feet away. An easy jump. He leapt, vaulted the rails, ran forward to the hold, where the final batten was still unplaced; swung himself down, hung and dropped. He landed on his feet, stood up and looked round, breathless.

The hold was practically empty. At first he could not see as far as the sides, but as his eyes became accustomed to the dim light, he was able to move about without fear of banging his head or shins. He could not be sure that no one had seen him either from the quay or the deck. In the farthest corner he found a pile of cases and a sheet of tarpaulin. He squeezed himself between the cases, lay flat, and pulled the tarpaulin over him. For the moment, he thought, he was safe.

Almost by accident he had found a comfortable position; comfortable, at any rate, for a short time. He lay still, in total darkness, conscious of some pleasure in the ease of his body, for he had worked hard that day, and the precipitate flight had taken the last of his strength. Evidently he had been unnoticed as he came aboard, for if anyone had seen him they would be searching the hold by now. That was a relief, and enough for him to think about. He could not think very clearly in the dark, did not want to think, for the thoughts that came to him at night were weird and hideous—they would possess and terrify him if he did not shut his mind against them. He knew that he was safe, safe from someone who had been running after him. That was enough. He was very tired, his limbs ached, and already his mind was sleepy.

Something was missing. Something that he was used to, something he wanted badly, could not do without, had gone away, was

lost. He tried to think what it was, and in the energy of deliberate thinking, scared thinking, he sat upright. But no. He could not remember what it was. It worried him, but perhaps it did not really matter. He lay back again.

Time began to run past him rapidly in the darkness, and he felt himself gently sinking. He heard, far away, noises, banging and thumping, but the cloak of his fatigue protected him from their disturbance. Presently—five minutes later, a month, a year later—he was dimly conscious of a new noise, continuous and vibrating.

PART III

XI

It seemed that the Memorandum which I had so long cherished in the womb of my mind would never be born, to delight my eye, in a dozen pages of close typescript, portentously entitled, punched, taped and bound. Each time the way grew clear there was some new obstruction; more letters arrived involving awkward points for decision, prolonged researches and meticulously drafted replies. And now, as the light began to fail, I opened another drawer and furiously attacked its contents, determined to eat my way out to the open spaces—where the labour of creation could begin. The noise of doors swinging and cheerful voices in the passages had long since warned me, like an alarm clock hardly noticed from beneath the bedclothes, that my day's wage had been earned. But with the first draft of that epoch-making Memorandum as the shining object of my journey I worked on heedlessly, and only when I was forced to turn my chair to get the light on the papers I was reading did it occur to me that the attempt was useless; my immediate objective could not be gained to-night; the letter that was to sweep his lordship's arguments into the dustbin must wait until to-morrow.

Wondering why Miss Gay had not switched on the light I glanced across the room to see if she was still in her corner. Yes, she was there, at the little table covered with her *impedimenta belli*, rubber stamps and paperweights, two dahlias in a potted-meat jar, a petticoated doll bristling with pins. She was sharpening her pencils. I turned on the light myself and looked at my watch. It was later than I had thought. "It's rather late, I'm afraid!" I spoke penitently, for in not putting on the light she had gently reproved me. She replied: "Oh, no, not really late!" and sat quite still, patient, as if expecting me to begin dictating. But I knew that she was grieved by my thoughtlessness, for in the normal hours of duty she would not have openly sharpened her own pencils in my office. Schooled in the second decade, a conscientious, unimaginative platoon-sergeant trans-sexed and purified, she would have waited there, pencil poised to record my momentous utterance, until the latest hour permitted by decorum. But a gentleman must show some consideration for a woman to whom he is not married. I got up quickly, stuffing papers away and slamming drawers. Miss Gay brought my hat and

umbrella. I said: "You really shouldn't have stayed so long, Miss Gay," and saved myself, by a hair's breadth, from adding: "I had no idea. . . ." She said, tidying the pens on my desk: "It's no trouble at all." I went out into Whitehall.

At half-past seven I was to meet Peggy at Alberto's, and we were going on to the Buckingham, where Mihailovna was dancing. Of Mihailovna, whose work was at that time little known in England, I had heard from Alec Gray, who had seen her in Budapest; and as it happened that my wife had studied with her at St. Petersburg before the war we were both anxious to see her dance. Elaine Chelcote, who was coming with us, had already seen and was crazy about her. To give Elaine pleasure was always a rich experience, and despite the architecture of the Buckingham, where easy vision and knee-room were alike considered inconsistent with a proper reverence for the work of Ibsen and Strindberg, the evening would be enjoyable. Of that I had been persuaded at least until luncheon; but now, emerging with acute consciousness of a dirty collar on to wet pavements, I did not feel so certain. The Tube station was a few yards away, and in little more than half an hour I could have been in my study chair with the new Wells which had come from Mudie's that morning. Instead, I had nearly an hour to kill, and with my mind still glancing back to the romping ground, that devastating letter to the truculent Lord S——, I could make no plan for the killing.

I started slowly and absently to walk towards Trafalgar Square, with the vague intention of reaching the Museum of Impossibilities. It was in the wrong direction, but there I could at least smoke a pipe comfortably, and I might meet Lanair, who would have gossip for me about Edward Hellin's libel action. The pavements were less crowded than they had been an hour before; a portion of the five o'clock flood had been drained away into the District Railway, and the buses as they passed would swing towards the kerb and slacken speed to scoop up a convenient spoonful from the margin. But still I had to thread my way and to dodge alertly as an unceasing procession of young women, singly or in pairs and trios, swept blindly towards me in the wake of their lowered umbrellas. A week ago it had been summer, and now, with the darkness falling prematurely, with the clouds low and shot with a strange, evil yellow above the Horse Guards, I could fancy that I smelt November. It was only the slide-over. There were still tanned faces among those that appeared between black hats and winged collars, still light dresses and thinnest stockings beneath the raincoats, as if the routine were a pretence, the coming London winter a reality to which we had not

yet woken from our country dreams. There was an untidiness; but that meant neither twilight nor autumn, for it was dawning on us now that this was normality, and that from our brown we should not return to black and discreet grey. How could we, when the tide of petticoats had not receded? What could we do but make a gesture of concord with round hats and even hats of soft material, with desolately naked faces? Here, in a very sanctuary of custom, I could feel if I caught my reflection in the window of a car that my working clothes made me an oddity, albeit that kind of oddity was still enough repeated to escape ridicule. And, curiously, I felt sometimes that only my clothes were still united, by historic association, with the buildings that stood on either side and looked with haughty curiosity across the coloured mackintoshes towards the strange white emblem that had sprouted between them. The change, the looseness, had somehow affected my own blood. There was inside me a person that contemplated, not distantly but with something akin to comprehension, the queer life about him that had come to these familiar places to replace the old. I was a little in the rear, a little breathless, but when I caught shreds of the conversation they did not come to me as in a foreign tongue.

Trafalgar Square, where the gusty wind whipped the light rain about our necks and faces, was a lake of wretchedness, in which the umbrellas floated, bobbing on uncertain and intersecting courses, like model yachts on the Whitestone Pond; and as we stood waiting to rush through a gap in the traffic the taxis splashed our shoes and stockings, the umbrellas of our neighbours poured a trickle of rain inside our collars, we were wrecked sailors caught in a whirlpool. At the street corners, crouched in the entrances to shops and stations, the newsboys tried to sell their papers. A few hours before a prosperous Bristol man, who had complained to his doctor of tiredness and lack of appetite, had brutally murdered his wife and children. And now, while a little crowd stood gazing at the drawn blinds of the sedate house where the outrage had been committed, and the man himself, unaware of the deed, was talking with affable incredulity to the police-sergeant, the fly-sheets twisting in the wind proclaimed a new and better sensation to relieve the tedium of the journey to Springfield Park. But we paid no attention to the little hunchback who shrieked hoarse abracadabras at us as we ran for our buses or jostled our way to the shops for refuge. A few puzzled strangers, a bearded Latin and an Irishwoman with a heavy suitcase, stood still in the middle of the pavement, afraid to stop the bodies that buffeted past them and waiting their chance to get at the traffic policeman. But it meant nothing to us, the swirl and tumult, for we had our own

business to consider; the traffic and the crowd on the pavements were the habitual medium through which we went our way, less hostile and no more animate than the choppy sea which a sailor regards complacently from a tilting bridge-deck. Perhaps I was less certain of my detachment than the rest, than the clerks in brown coats and bowlers, and the girls with sharp, set faces; for in the eyes of the bewildered Irishwoman I had seen a look that had a reflection in my own mind, a lack of hard purpose which left us at the mercy of those who knew their objective. And with a sudden nervousness, a faint recrudescence of the bewilderment I had known in my own first days of London, I turned sharply into Charing Cross and increased my pace, as if with some set intention. I had no such intention, for I was not in the mood to face the ribaldry which might await my bedraggled appearance at the Museum, and I could think of no friend who lived near enough to let me dry at his fire and clean myself.

It dawned on me, as I made my way along the Strand, that I had had no tea. Miss Gay had brought my cup as usual, but in the eager pursuit of a correspondent's paragraph that would serve me well for quotation I had refused it. It would be a pity, I reflected, to blunt the edge of the appetite I had ready for Signor Alberto's treatment. But middle age had weaknesses. I saw a little tea-shop—it was labelled, if I remember rightly, *The Adolescent Bun Company*—and I stopped at the door to see if there were men taking tea at such a place. An urchin, coming up beneath my elbow, whispered "All about the murder, sir," and sold me a newspaper before I had the presence of mind to prevent him. Yes, there were several men, devouring poached eggs with morbid intensity and apparently unaware of the girls who outnumbered them. I went inside and found my way to an empty table.

For some time the waitresses drove past me without a glance in my direction. Even when one of them paused for a moment to dash a bill in front of my *vis-à-vis* at the next table she avoided my eye, and I lacked courage to call "Miss!" which appeared to be the means of summoning. My paper lay on the empty stone table in front of me, rather damp and unappetising. It is not my custom to read the evening newspapers; I am content to hear the bad tidings when they arrive, in the *Manchester Guardian*, with my eggs and bacon; but the Establishment was evidently in no mood to accept my business, and I had to seek means for diverting my thoughts from the dampness of my trousers. I picked up the paper and unfolded it. The front page was largely taken up with the Bristol affair, and I marvelled that so many lines of description could have been issued in

London so quickly. The actual information was, indeed, scanty, and many of the details given appeared to me irrelevant to the subject; but they were not without their own interest, and I was astonished to find how much was known in Fleet Street about the life, family, friends and circumstances of a leather merchant whose name I had never before heard. Even his photograph, that of a very young man, was printed. It appeared that the unhappy man was of good family, had done well in the war, and had been awarded the D.S.O. for conspicuous gallantry. He was a devoted husband and father. Skipping the description of the estates owned by Mr. —'s father-in-law, and that of a Derby reader's fox-terrier which made different barks when shown different chapters of the Bible, I turned to the centre sheets, where the illicit amours of an actress were summarized in captions extending across one page, while on the opposite leaf a Bishop wrote about the decay of physical courage and a Mr. Tight-weather on the returning popularity of fretwork. At this point, to my surprise, a tired girl with an engagement ring came up and demanded my order. I asked her for buttered toast and a cup of tea. Neglecting the Bishop, whose thesis was much disturbed by the interspersion of editorial sub-headings, I let my eye fall to the foot of the right-hand page, where, in my experience, happenings that are really unusual and interesting are most often recorded. I read: "‘Oh, Mother, teacher says I have no powers of concentration.’ ‘We’ll soon put that right, dear, with Blick Picks at breakfast.’ Adv’t." Further up, however, I found a short paragraph that was perhaps worth my penny. A lake in the Belgian Congo, of some hundred and fifty square miles’ area, had suddenly disappeared. Within a week it had drained away, leaving only a weedy marsh to mark its passing. "Local surveyors," my paper remarked with an apologetic shrug, "are unable to account for the mysterious phenomenon." The girl brought my tea, which she had released from a cistern. But had the local surveyors really surveyed? I wondered. Were they even now standing in a group at the border of the marsh, peering anxiously for some sign of an escape? Would our own surveyors be so ready to confess themselves at a loss if Windermere were suddenly to vanish in that disquieting manner? I glanced at my watch and saw that the time was going. I had actually been too reckless, and it might be necessary, now, to take a cab to Alberto's. I finished the toast and drained my cup, unregretfully; and looked for my waitress. She was not in sight. Remembering that kettles boil faster unobserved I turned back to my paper, hardly hoping to squeeze a little more value before bequeathing it to the next comer. Beneath the account of the missing lake was an untitled paragraph I had not noticed:

A Dutch vessel arriving at Newcastle this afternoon reported that a young stowaway had been found on board. The youth, who has given his name as Gotthold, appeared to be suffering from loss of memory.

I thought: "Why did they put that in? Was it just to fill up a half-inch of the column?" And simultaneously my mind was repeating: "Gotthold?" Curiously, a quarter-second must have passed before I could fit the name on to the right thread of memory; but before I had attached it I had felt in my forehead the slight physical sensation of excitement. When, a moment later than perception, I had straightened my thoughts, I was still uncertain how to act.

The shop was more empty now. I saw my waitress standing idle by the service-hatch, and I went over to ask her if there was a telephone I could use. It was important, I said. She looked at me in some alarm, perhaps doubting my sanity, but after a moment's hesitation led me to a cubby-hole of an office where an elderly spectacled woman sat at a table checking a cash book. At one end of the table, amid a litter of papers and box files, stood a telephone. Permission granted, I rang up the Museum of Impossibilities, and inquired for Lanair. Yes, he was there, he would come in a minute.

"Lanair," I said, "this is serious. Can you do a job for me?"

"Anything," he said, "anything in the world."

"No, I'm serious. Can you get to Alberto's in about half an hour, give my wife and a girl some dinner and take them on to the theatre? I'm paying, of course——"

"Of course," he said. "Your wife's a nice creature. I'll go. Can you——?"

"——And look here. Tell Peggy, will you—what? Yes, she has the tickets—Tell Peggy, will you, that I've had to go off to Newcastle on business. I shall be——"

He said: "She won't believe that, old boy, but I'll do my——"

"At seven-thirty, sharp!" I said, and rang off.

The beldame who owned the office was standing nervously at the door, evidently uncertain whether to upbraid me for disturbing her privacy or to retire for the sake of mine. I asked her if she had a railway guide—if so, would she please look up the next train to Newcastle—and got through to David Holmes.

"I want your help," I said.

"Professional?" he asked. "If so, I'll charge up this conversation."

I wished that my friends would not invariably regard me as an occasion for their cheerfulness.

"Partly," I answered. "Can you come to Newcastle with me? It's important."

"When?"

"To-night. One minute—(Have you found that train? King's Cross, seven-eighteen, thank you!)—King's Cross, seven-eighteen, can you manage it? Good! And I say—can you bring some cash? I'm short. What? Oh, about ten pounds would probably be enough. Well, will you get the tickets? All right, on the train."

I gave the woman half-a-crown and asked her to pay my bill. Whether she rang up the police after I had gone I do not know. I went out and hailed a cab.

As I sat back, comfortable and enjoying my isolation from the dripping figures on the pavement, I wondered whether my guess was only a wild one. The name, as I had once had good reason to know, was common enough. There was no other connecting link between the boy who had vanished in Birnewald and the one who had been found hiding in a Dutch ship. And yet . . . I was superstitious (since there is no milder word) and I had lived many weeks with the belief that I should see him again. ("If ever you should meet Klaus, you'll give him my love—" and I had met him and the message was still not given.) It had passed for ever, the incident that closed with a train sliding out of Peterborough Station, and I had forgotten her features, and almost her name. And yet, pursuing a crazy mission, I had been led back to her. In the half-light between sleep and consciousness I saw her often, laughing. And with that laughter still fresh in the ear of my memory I believed sometimes that in another place, turning a corner suddenly, I would find that Bennett Williams had been mistaken. In a dark place, for I connected her with darkness, and with the musty odour of shabby houses, the feeble light of a gas-lamp and a fire flickering. To Charles it would be otherwisc, when he still remembered. To him she would be so'ness, and the magic scent of rare women, and only a darkness that was warm with life and the feel of a heart beating. To me her presence, magnified in disembodiment, was that of a hungry animal, walking in the shadow not far away. But if I had known how to satisfy her hunger . . .

As the cab swung round sharply I was flung across the seat. Looking up, I saw faces, distinct for a moment beneath the street lamps, then snatched away. Recalled, I sat up and felt in my pocket for the fare. I had a glimpse of a clock which showed that I had

four minutes to spare. The cab drew up, and I hurried away to find the train.

By one of the front carriages David waited, looking at his wrist watch. He said, as I joined him: "You've cut it fine, John." We took our places opposite each other, exchanged pouches, and regarded one another with amused solemnity.

"It's decent of you——" I said.

"How did you come?" he asked, "you've been a long time. By taxi—where from? The Strand? You should have come on the Piccadilly—much quicker. It's wrong, thinking that the dearest way's always the quickest."

Certainly he had done the journey quickly. He was in the brown tweed clothes he wore for travelling—never, before eight o'clock, in his chambers—and I saw on the rack above his head a neat, small suitcase, double-strapped and labelled. I guessed that inside were the exact necessities for two nights at a hotel, including a spare shirt, travelling slippers, and a medium-weight dressing-gown. From the case I looked back to David, long and broad and immensely bony; at his big, bony hands, his face, that looked as if it had been holly-stoned down from the rough to the legal pattern, his immense, beetle eyebrows. And I thought again, how strange that a man so huge and angular could act when he pleased—as he always reasoned—so nimbly and so precisely.

"If you don't think I'm fit company," he said, aware of my scrutiny, "I'll find another carriage. We can find each other at Newcastle."

"You can stay," I replied, and he took a parcel from the pocket of his overcoat and untied the string.

"You've brought your dinner?" I asked.

With a smile at the corner of his lips, he unwrapped the parcel and showed me his book. It was entitled *The Celestial Pathway, or The Exact Means by which the Way of Salvation, as Described in Holy Writ, may be Discovered, together with Eighteen Diagrams, the Work of the Author, Devised by Accurate Calculations in the Mathematics. By Doctor Johannis Orwell, Clerk, Master of Arts, Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford.* The date was 1787, and the price, scrawled in pencil on the fly-leaf, sevenpence.

"And this," he said, "will be suitable for a more frivolous mind." He gave me a magazine. It was the *Cornhill*.

He had changed very little, I thought, in the course of a journey that had led him from Glasgow to Bombay, to Egypt, to Gallipoli and back to London. The Indian tan had worn off. He spoke with a little more brogue than he had had in Glasgow, as dignifies

an exile. His hair was greying; an early grey that came, I knew, from long days in the Courts followed by work into the small hours of the morning; and for reading he wore spectacles now. He looked more than mature, elderly, and very wise. But he had always looked wise, his eyes had been always the same faint grey. When he smiled I had the feeling that our friendship, so unbroken and so unchanged, was new, and that if I had grown older I had simply approached nearer to his unchanged maturity; if wiser, nearer to his wisdom. I saw him unaltered, as a child does not realize, before his own adolescence, that his parents are growing older.

He had opened the book at the place he had marked, and was intent upon it, his eyes serious behind the distorting lenses, his lips gently twitching. I turned to a story about Johannesburg and read a few pages, with my eyes only, my mind arranging an explanation. Then as my pipe came to an end, I leant forward.

"It's hard on you, David," I said, "my dragging you off like this. I suppose you'd got something perfectly delightful fixed up for this evening."

He lowered his book and took off his spectacles.

"It's worth more than sevenpence," he said. "It's spurious, of course; I should say that the good Doctor Orwell was a copyist, or maybe a printer's devil, or just an ordinary swindler who scribbled when times were bad, living in a cellar somewhere in Barbican, maybe—or no, nearer Fleet Street—he gets most of his Latin from law books. But a grand improviser, and he didn't forget much of what he copied. If the man had been——"

"What had you arranged for this evening?" I asked.

"Arranged? A concert. Not a very good concert."

"Who?"

"I forget. A pianist. What's his name? Hannson. And a soprano, Marie Paynter. Nothing first-rate—there isn't anything first-rate yet."

"I'm sorry, all the same," I said.

He leant forward, bringing his head close to mine.

"What's the trouble this time?" he asked.

This time? So he hasn't forgotten. But of course not, and there had been smaller things since, ever so many. I felt ashamed as I began to count them: finding a tutor for Eric Wield, meeting Mabel at Aden and escorting her to Cairo, lending his chambers to assist the progress of my courtship. . . . But "this time" meant Glasgow—or was it only that my own thoughts were there?

"I'm a constant nuisance," I said.

"It's a privilege," he replied, with mock urbanity.

"You've heard me talk of Klaus?" I began, "you remember—Klaus Gotthold?"

He nodded, and reflected for a moment, as if glancing over the latest pages of a case-book.

"I remember," he said, and then, suddenly eager, "you've found him?"

I said: "Yes, I think so. No, I don't know. I hope so."

"Charles know?" he asked.

I shook my head. "No, for Charles there's no Klaus. It ended at Glasgow as far as he knows."

In David's eyes I thought I saw a momentary anger. He moistened his lips before he spoke again.

"Did he never try to—find out anything? Or is he biologically ignorant?"

"No, just more than ordinarily unimaginative. At least, that's how I see it. Of course, a man tries to obliterate what's ended hopelessly. He won't let his mind run anywhere near it. Naturally I——"

He interrupted my inept apologia.

"So you think you've traced him. At Newcastle? Or do we have to go further, Norway or those parts?"

"No," I said, "there are limits even to my importunity. Newcastle."

"I'm glad you brought me," he said, and he pronounced the "glad" with such incision that even had I doubted the sincerity of his complaisance it would have satisfied me. "I tell you, I fretted when I heard you'd lost him. It was a wretched business."

"It was my fault," I said. "I thought I couldn't do anything, and I cleared off. Obviously I should have stayed in Birnewald, waited a bit and gone round again, and in time——"

"And then invented a grand story for the Government to explain why you were never seen at work?"

He was only making excuses for me, but I was grateful to him.

We were summoned to dinner.

"Of course," I explained, as we sat pulling our rolls to pieces, "I wanted you most, just—well, because I get on better with things when you're with me. But I wanted you specially as a lawyer. I rather fancy I shall want to do some funny business."

He asked: "What do you mean, 'funny business'?"

"I don't know the correct term. 'Manipulation of the law'—is that it?"

"In Whitehall, perhaps. In the Courts we practise the law, we do not manipulate it. What's the boy done? (Clear for me.)"

"Nothing—yet. He arrived as a stowaway, and——"

"Ah, you call that nothing? When?"

"This afternoon."

"You've been quick."

"I was lucky."

I explained (conscious as I did so how inadequate was my information) what had set me off in the direction of Newcastle. He was too tactful to ask what I had thought to gain by taking the first train. "So you see," I pursued, glossing over the vast lacunæ in every strip of my logic, "there may be some legal business involved. I ought, of course, to have got hold of my own solicitor, but apart from will-making, which he does very well——"

"May be some legal business!" he echoed. "He boards a ship as a stowaway. That is trespass. He can be presumed to have intended landing without authority or passport. That is contravention of the Alien Acts. There will be a whole history-book of minor torts, but I won't worry you with them. Man, it's not a lawyer you want to settle things, it's an anarchist revolution."

"Still," I argued, "I take it that you'll be able to—work things?"

"That's another of your phrases that I don't know," he said severely. "What do you want exactly—if we do find him?"

"I want to keep him here. In England. I can't look after him anywhere else."

"Nor in England, either," he objected. "You're one who thinks he can always look after everybody. It's not possible."

What did that mean? Was he remembering how he had received a telegram covering several forms—a heart-attack for a thrifty man—and been sent on a spying expedition to satisfy my passion for "looking after people"? Did he believe that when——?

"I don't see how it can be done," he said decisively, "unless he's equipped with a passport in proper order. Even then, there'd be complications"

"I imagine that stowaways don't as a rule carry passports."

"Well, they should do. It's very irregular to travel without a passport."

He lapsed into silence, and from the way he played with his sole, prodding it with his fork while it got steadily colder, I could see that his brain was working.

"I've friends in Newcastle," he said presently, "lawyers and others. There's quite a Scots colony there. But they're all very upright men," he added sadly.

For a while we ate steadily, and I thought we would say no more on the subject. He did not, indeed, speak again until the

coffee was brought. Then, pulling hard at his pipe to get it going, he said between the draws: "Nothing illegal—that's fixed. But it's curious what you can find in the law." Then, "Man, I'm glad you brought me into this."

With that I could leave the matter, content to watch in his face the signs that his fine mind was at work on the problem; uneasy still when I thought of what this expedition must cost to a man as busy as he was. "I'm slack," he said, when I voiced my thoughts. "There's nothing to do these days but tidy up back work." But it was not often, I reflected, that I could open a paper without seeing his name in the law columns; and when I remembered what he was able to charge his clients I realized again how great was the value, in plain figures, of this man's friendship.

We returned to our carriage and for half an hour talked lazily of trivial things, of mutual friends, of theatres, of old days at Oxford. At Peterborough we were told that our sleeper was ready, and we decided to turn in at once. I was in bed first, and I lay on one side watching with interest the way in which David folded each of his garments as he removed it, patiently balancing himself while the train threw him from side to side between the berths; his meticulous ablutions, the fury with which he attacked his teeth, using what looked like a miniature curry-brush.

I asked: "What time do we get in?"

He said: "Before three. But they won't disturb us till seven."

"I'm glad we haven't got to get out of the train in the small hours," I said.

"And they would charge you for the whole night at a hotel," he added, "no matter what time you arrived."

With that concession to tradition (or perhaps to excuse himself, remembering that the money he was spending would be mine) he turned out the light.

"I hope we'll find him," he said. "Good-night."

I thought I should fall asleep at once, for I was very tired. But as we grow older sleep is bought more dearly, and I had not lost consciousness when we stopped with a jerk at Grantham. I heard David breathing easily. I was nearly off when the train, starting again, re-awoke me. The stay-rod was missing from the bottom of one of the blinds, and we had not been able to fasten it down, so as I lay with eyes half-open I could see lights passing. The rhythm of our motion, now regular, lulled my senses into restfulness, but my mind ran oddly, centring about the object of my journey, which lost its proportions and assumed a grotesque shape under my twilight scrutiny. I could no longer remember the name of the place to which

the train was taking me, and I thought that it must be Glasgow; that name was wrong, but a picture of Glasgow, a faded and distorted picture, would place itself at the end of the rails as I saw them in fancy stretching away from beneath my berth, northwards. I had the feeling that I was passing again through a section of my life already past, that I was repeating a tragic mistake. One thing puzzled me. David, I thought, should be waiting for me at the place where I was going; yet I knew that the man lying opposite me, whose form beneath the bedclothes I could dimly see as we passed the lights of a level-crossing, was David. I could not remember how the journey had started, only that it had started in a hurry and that I had undertaken it upon a sudden resolve. The one positive fact that loomed large in my consciousness was that I had been reading the *Cornhill*; and I felt that everything would be clear to me if I could find out one thing: whether the story I had been reading was about a woman called Alice McPrae. Twice I determined to switch on the light, find the magazine, and settle my doubts. But my arm, fastened beneath my chest, would not answer to my will. For a moment I saw Hedwig's face, and I thought that she would be able to tell me. But she would not speak, she only laughed silently, and presently I began to run between the rails, lightly, easily, but unable to catch up with the train, which blinked at me with its rear light as it fled away.

At Newcastle we found clear weather, colder than the weather we had left; and even from the siding where our coach lay I could see, from a few trees which showed between and above the trucks and smoky buildings, that winter was more advanced. It was not yet five when I looked at my watch, and I lay still, but impatiently, unable to sleep again and thirsty for certainty. At six David awoke, as if roused by an alarm-clock, sat up without yawning and started to talk as if he had never been asleep. He was as ready as I to get up, for he never stayed in bed, he told me, after six. We shaved in turn, and as we finished dressing we were pushed into the station. We collected our trunks and got out.

It was still too early for the shops to be open when we finished breakfast at the station hotel. I was for going straight to the docks, in the hope of picking up some information that would lead us to our quarry; but David was certain that this would be a waste of time—we must advance by proper stages, he said—and I had not brought him so far with the intention of conducting the campaign by my own wits. We sauntered backwards and forwards along Grainger

Street until the Post Office opened, when David wrote a number of telegrams, in sum several times the length of the one which I had once sent him. We next visited the first shipping office we found open—it was, I think, that of the Fred Olsen line—and here we were immediately lucky. The master of one of the Norwegian mail steamers, whom we met in the outer office, knew at any rate some of the facts. Yes, he had heard about the stowaway—he had in fact met the master of the ship at the Neptune Institute the night before. It was the *Arnhem*, a cargo steamer. Captain Jorgensen, our informant, had noticed her coming in, and she was berthed close to his own ship. “A tub,” he said, “what I should call a Noah’s Ark. And she could do with a coat of paint.” But the master—what was his name? Kestel—he was a good fellow, had the look of a sailor about him. (There was some humour in this statement, and looking at Jorgensen, who, from his fresh, clear skin, might have done all his sailing in the deck cabins of the *Mauretania*, I guessed the joke.) “I like the Dutch, myself,” he added, “but better when they are friendly, yes?” The stowaway, yes, a German boy. Yes, he had given his name as Gotthold, but that might or might not be correct; apparently the boy was weak in the head. Kestel knew something about him, but Jorgensen couldn’t remember the whole story. He thought, if he had understood Kestel aright, that the boy was being detained on board pending examination—the authorities had been too busy to deal with the matter yesterday. Probably he’d be sent back in the same ship and prosecuted in Rotterdam—but Jorgensen was not certain about the procedure. “We don’t have stowaways on my ship,” he said. Not at all, it was a pleasure. “Good morning, gentlemen!”

I pictured the *Arnhem* steaming down the Tyne, and though David moved fast on his long shanks it was not fast enough for me.

“I doubt the tide’s not right,” he said, soothing my impatience. “And there are places lower down where we could stop her. But our friend’s knowledge of British Alien Acts is far from perfect—they’ll not be taking him away before His Majesty’s Government has been over him with a spy-glass. You must surely know, for all your ignorance of legal matters, that the Government likes to keep filling up its little notebooks. Isn’t that how you get your bread and butter?”

We made our way down Pilgrim Street, which was crowded with traffic now, and reaching the quays turned right. I ran my eye along the line of ships, but could not see the name *Arnhem*. I longed to walk the whole length, but the Customs House was

close by and into this David led me. We asked to see the Senior Immigration Officer and sent in our cards.

David's name, I suppose, carried weight, for in a surprisingly short time we were taken into the inner office. The Immigration Officer, a short, lame Devonian who seemed worried and was plainly overworked, greeted us with nervous brusqueness. He was not, however, more brusque than David suddenly became.

David's manner in that interview reminded me of all the master detectives whom I have ever seen conducting the last rites upon the stage, and I felt almost ashamed to be a party to his inquisition. After the shortest of formalities he came to the point.

"I understand that the *Arnhem*, a Dutch vessel which berthed yesterday, has reported a stowaway? The name given is Gotthold, no first name? And I am right in believing that he is being detained on board for examination?"

Mr. Hemming-Lacey, our victim, confirmed the information.

"That is quite regular?"

It cannot be supposed that Mr. Lacey had had any doubt as to the regularity, or was imperfectly acquainted with the text of his duties. I was surprised to hear him answer:

"I have no reason to believe otherwise."

David looked at him as a schoolmaster at a boy who has confused the Reform Acts. His lips twisted, and then, as if deciding to overlook a misdemeanour, he went on:

"The boy is reported to be suffering from loss of memory, is that so?"

Mr. Lacey nodded.

"He has been examined already by the medical officer, of course?"

"Not yet."

"Not yet?"

"No, not yet."

Without actually shrugging his shoulders David conveyed the impression of having done so.

"It is important," he said, "that we should see the boy as soon as possible. Unless we are mistaken we shall probably be able to establish his identity, and that of course will mean an alteration in the procedure."

Mr. Lacey appeared puzzled.

"An alteration——?"

"Sir John has come down for that purpose, representing the Home Office. The legal arrangements will be in my hands. However, there is no need for me to go into details now. If we are wrong in our surmise about the boy's identity we shall naturally

hand the case back to you to be dealt with in the ordinary way. At present all we require is an official permit to see the boy. Without that the Dutchman might raise objections."

Mr. Lacey leant towards his bell.

"I'll get an officer to take you down," he said.

"There's no need for that trouble," David answered.

I think the man was reluctant to give us the permit, but I saw his eye stray to the pile of papers awaiting his attention on one side of his desk, and when a clerk came in he only asked for the document to be made out and brought to him. He was an honest man, and I was ashamed to bully a good Civilian in this unprecedented fashion. When he had nervously scrutinized us once again, still half-afraid perhaps, that we were Bolsheviks in disguise, he signed the chit and wished us "Good morning."

"We may return," David said, and in his R, rolled ludicrously, there was a threatening note.

"I don't want to criticize," I said when we were outside, "but was it altogether wise to say that I'm in the Home Office. He's only got to look at his book——"

"Are you not?" he asked. "Then I've been guilty of an untruth. But I've no memory any more. Still, it would be hardly worth our troubling the good man by going back to say that I was mistaken."

"You were pretty rough with the poor fellow," I ventured, as we walked eastward along the quays. "He didn't try to thwart us——"

"But he would have tried. Rough? Oh, come, that's a hard word. But you see, it's this way. What he does is right. You can't argue with a policeman, or any other man that King George pays for the special business of interfering with good folk in one way or another. You'd have to get an Act of Parliament passed before you could say 'Bo!' to Mr. Lacey on his own little strip of territory. So there's only one thing you can do, and that's to make him feel he's the tiniest wee man that was ever allowed away from his mammy. So long as he's too frightened to look up his little book of regulations and see if he's forgotten any, you're all right. It's no good giving him time to start wondering."

"You should know," I said.

"Ah, the Civil Service!" he muttered. "They're a pig-headed lot!"

I let that pass. Inwardly I rejoiced to see him in his fighting mood, for though I did not know the book as he did I remembered equivalent cases into which I had been dragged at one time and

another, and I knew, if only vaguely, what a hornet's nest of difficulty we were approaching. I knew—because I could not believe that our expedition would collapse in an anticlimax when we reached the *Arnhem*.

It was a day for optimism. The sharp wind carried a faint smell of house-fire smoke, winter's comfort, and the light smoke rising from the Gateshead bank dissolved easily into a sky flecked with light, running clouds. The sunshine, reflected gleaming from the surface of the Tyne, lightened all the browns and greys, dazzled us when we faced it, looking ahead over the water, and sharpened the intricate pattern of derricks, masts, yards and bridges behind. The quay was empty, but for a few loungers, and on the river there was little traffic. Further down, where it turned to disappear, I could see cranes swinging, a ferry darting across, and at a greater distance moving objects which might be on shore or water. Far off, up-river, a ship's siren was lamenting, and nearer we could hear the sound of hammers on steel. To me the scene was heartening, for I had on either side the worlds I had not tasted till manhood, worlds relished once, for their strangeness, upon the first impingement, and the relish never forgotten; the lean, complex presence of a city working, fresh, with the hot odours drowned by a few hours of darkness; and to relieve the cramp of houses pitched close upon each other, the river, like a broad street, rippled and shining, the whole extent broken only by vehicles that ran without screech or rattle, lying at comfort in the water, their furrows instantly closed behind them. At each ship we passed a new odour, the elements freshly compounded, invaded the general scent of morning smoke admixed with paint and pitch, and at each I seemed to remember some old excitement: my first visit to Hay's Wharf; Dieppe, first seen on a chilly Spring morning; the Docks jutting from West Street into the Hudson; my first sight of Stockholm. The slight, pulsing headache with which I had woken had disappeared in the clean wind and the recapture of a pleasure not lately tasted; and with it the oppression of threatening dreams, dreams that had stayed with me for an hour after waking but which I would not remember now until I was again surrounded by bed-clothes and darkness. All my senses fluttered my hopefulness, and I strode forward with David a yard behind, peering to read the name of the ship next ahead, oblivious alike of staring sailors, loose ropes that tripped me, and David's gentle sarcasm. After all, I had waited some time for this resurrection.

The *Arnhem* lay, as a stevedore had informed us, nearly opposite to the *Mariners' Heritage*. Her appearance was derelict, she needed new paint, and even with a landsman's eye I could see why Captain

Jorgensen had called her a Noah's Ark. A man was lazily dabbing paint on the taffrail, as if making a start with a formidable task, and as we reached the top of the gangway he came forward to accost us. Except for the words "nuddin doin" he spoke no English, but when we tried him with a little German, repeating "*Der Kapitän*" and "Kestel," he at last realized our meaning, laughed as if our stupidity would brighten the rest of his days, and with many good-natured courtesies, uttered over his shoulder in Rotterdam argot, led us to the master's cabin.

I liked Kestel directly I saw him. I should have said—but for his check-bones and rather flat lips—that he was an English sailor. His beard was of the English nautical pattern, his eyes a shade of blue that I have always regarded as peculiarly English. He was a big, bulky man, with a huge chest, very short grey hair that curled into a little comb above his forehead, grey-brown eyebrows that looked as if they had been singed, skin of a splendid hard texture. His left arm stopped short at the elbow. He was at his table, writing, when we were ushered in. (I fancied that he was making up his log for the last week or so, but remembering that Dutch guns were once heard in the Medway I fear that I may have wronged a great maritime people.) He rose to greet us, apologized for his harbour kit, and had offered us cigars and schnapps before we attempted to explain our business.

Without waiting for me to produce the permit, which was in my coat pocket, David attacked the business on his own. He was very sorry, he said, that Herr Kapitän Kestel had been troubled with a stowaway. He was right, was he not, in supposing that instructions had been given for the youth to be detained aboard pending examination? Well, immigration authorities had their own way of doing things—it was very often the easiest way that presented itself. He wouldn't say that their action was definitely illegal, but he much regretted the additional inconvenience caused to the Herr Kapitän.

Kestel here interposed that he did not feel himself injured in complying with the authority's orders. In other places—in Hamburg, for example—the port authority was much more difficult to deal with; and indeed, he liked the boy, he was glad to have him a little longer, he only wanted to do anything possible for the boy's welfare.

"A strange young man," he said, "not right in the head, but not wicked at all. I saw him first at Peterhaven, where we were unloading. He was half-starved, I guessed. I give him a meal and he works for me. He works very well, very hard, understands easily the jobs I give him. Then, when we have been under steam a few

hours, my boatswain who has been down in the hold to search for something that is missing comes to me and says he has seen a ghost. That is the boy, lying asleep behind a pile of tea-chests. I ask him: Why? does he want to be made a sailor? He says no, he does not know why, he cannot remember. He has run away from the Abbey, he says, and I ask him: What abbey?—and he cannot tell me. Still, he is nice boy. He works, and he eats like a negro of California, and he smiles now and again, and he doesn't talk much."

We learnt in the course of further conversation that Kestel had cabled a report of the affair to his owners and was expecting a reply. He did not suppose, however, that the Company would prosecute. "They are good people," he said, "a Quaker family, and when they have my full report I think they will not take action. After all, the boy, what does he cost us? A few meals, eh? And I make him work for those. And a so big lad helps to steady the ship."

David, I think, would have prolonged the conversation as far as he could. He was plainly anxious to gain Kestel's full confidence and friendship, and at pains also—if I had interpreted him rightly—to give the impression that persons of such importance as ourselves could override the orders of any mere immigration authority. (He had already hinted that I was the Chief Commissioner of Police and he a Magistrate of special powers.) For myself, I would have enjoyed Kestel's company for long enough; his smile, which broadened slowly from good humour to merriment, his thoughtful eyes, the gravity of his nod, his good, deliberate English, hardly ever incorrect except in verb tenses. But I had not come to Newcastle to enjoy the talk of admirable men. Each time a gap in the conversation was swiftly filled I grew more impatient. I could actually feel my heart beating. Somewhere in this ship—as yet I did not know where—Klaus was imprisoned. More clearly than I saw Kestel or David, closer to me, I seemed to see Heinrich Gotthold, his serious, pale face, the blue smoke twisting up from his cigarette; and between Kestel's ponderous sentences I could hear the shout that had followed me down the stairs and on through the succeeding days. "Get out! Get out!" I stood up, at last, and murmured something to David. "My friend is most anxious to see the boy," he said to Kestel, and Kestel, with an apology he did not owe us, pushed back his chair.

"Ah, so, yes! He is in the Chief Engineer's cabin—it is comfortable there, and it has the only door in this dam steamer that shuts with lock. Come please."

David said he would wait for me—on deck, he would not take up any more of the master's time and room. So I went alone with

Kestel, who, when we reached the cabin, called in German: "A visitor, a nice man!" unlocked the door, opened it, and went away.

I had no clear mental picture of Klaus which I could expect to be matched by reality. Months had passed since I had seen him, and life had so changed in that time, from the mere numbness of living without danger to a clumsy copy of the pre-war years which we learnt was to be accepted as modernity, that it seemed much longer. I had seen him in a darkened room, had noted his likeness to my father, as likenesses are always apparent at the first encounter; for the rest, I had of him an impression that was more of qualities than of actual features, and knowing how rapidly a boy's face changes I would not have promised to recognize his present photograph. Yet, when I stood on the threshold of the engineer's cabin, I knew instantly that it was Klaus who sat on the bunk. Nor was it his face that told me, for he was half-reclining on a pillow propped against the head-rail and his head was almost completely hidden by Goudie's *Steam Turbines*. I stood silently until, evidently reaching the end of a paragraph, he placed a ruler to mark his page, closed the book, and put it down. When I saw his face I could not believe that I had ever forgotten its features. And again, as I was never so clearly to see it afterwards, I saw my father's likeness.

Absorbed, he had not realized that his visitor was a stranger, and he stared at me rather as a nine-months baby stares at a strange face appearing over the perambulator. Then, collecting himself, he slipped off the bunk, brought his feet together, and said "Gotthold."

I said in German: "Herr Klaus Gotthold, is it not?" and held out my hand.

Again he hesitated, but remembering the nature of this greeting he took my hand and shook it, not with an Englishman's natural friendliness, but stiffly, with a little bow. And he answered me in English:

"Yes, that is my name."

His manners were perfect, and they went oddly with his dress, which had evidently been borrowed from one of the men—a dark-blue jumper and corduroy trousers, brown canvas shoes. But that contrast was as nothing to the grotesque marriage of two opposite types in his face. It was a German face, in spite of the crown of curly hair, grey in patches, and the straight English nose; he had a scholar's forehead, and there was something of the scholar and humanist in his strange eyes, eyes that were now a little frightened, and remote, as if the candle of spirit were held far back within them. His mouth, too, in spite of the fringe of moustache above it, too mature for it, was sensitive, patrician. But about that nucleus of

cultured features the flesh was coarse, the outlines ugly, the skin pock-marked, red in places and chapped, in places like the healthless skin of extravagant indulgence. Round his chin, so thick as to disguise its contour and reaching almost to his ears, was as much of a beard as a normally hirsute man would grow in ten days. His neck, skinny, with Adam's apple too prominent, was indecently hairy. Half his left ear appeared to have been shot away. I had seen men before who possessed severally all those marks of neglect and hardship; prisoners we took at Foulescour, Belfast out-of-works lined up by the palings in Crumlin Road, consumptive lads in the back streets of Stratford and Whitechapel. I cannot remember another living face which showed so starkly, beyond the signs of ill-usage, those of a will long exhausted, of abandonment to whims of chance, of the spirit's desertion. The face that one sees in a nightmare, that of a familiar and beloved person grown suddenly horrible, devil-haunted; young and old together, at once coarse and sensitive. Yet there was uppermost—or so I could make myself believe, I had waited so long to see this face again—the expression of a boy, gentle, growing to strength of vision. As we looked at each other, seeking friendliness, I felt a hot anger growing, a desperate anger, because it could find no single object. My mind swept the wide horizon, seeking to include in its hatred the million personalities that had combined to perpetrate this callous outrage. It conjured a distorted vision of bland, elderly men lounging in the deep chairs of London clubs, of spider-like little bourgeois banging their thin white hands on café tables, of heavy-moustached officers in grey uniform, eyes glinting at the sight of men ranged to look like a well-trimmed privet hedge, of smelly tradesmen, of perfect husbands in well-starched collars talking of the reality of pounds, shillings and pence, confidence, security, development—across long polished tables on which were ritually arranged the lines of inkwells and squares of virgin blotting-paper. But that was too close. Glasgow, and a French village in the cold early morning. My own collar, as well-starched as that of any man in London. . . .

It was better—it was only possible—to take the boldest course.

"I think we have met before," I said.

I sat down on the end of the bunk and held out my cigarettes. He took one, and I held a match for him.

"I do not remember——"

"In Birnewald," I prompted.

I thought that the name startled him for a moment, but he answered:

"No. I have never been there."

That avenue was closed. I was relieved and frustrated. Without much thought I asked:

"What is your next move, do you think?"

"I have no wish to move," he said.

I wished that I had brought David in with me.

"You're happy here, then, in this ship?"

"Yes," he replied.

My sense of renewing an old acquaintance was so strong that it had not occurred to me, till now, that I had so far said nothing to explain my own identity.

"I was anxious to see you," I said, "because I once knew"—but I hesitated at the word "father," and taking another chance, finished—"I once knew your mother. Here in England. A good many years ago."

"In England?"

"Yes."

"Here?"

"Here in England."

He looked puzzled, distrait, and then remembered.

"Yes, they told me that we had come to England. But I have not been off the ship. Herr Kestel said I was not to go off the ship."

"You want to?"

He said decisively: "No! I do not want to visit England."

I asked: "Why?" but he did not answer.

"But you would like just to see it?" I argued. "Surely, it is always interesting to see a new country. It comes in useful, knowledge of foreign countries. And you speak English so well."

He pondered.

"Perhaps I will see it," he said.

(Perhaps. That depended on David.)

"But I do not want to stay there."

I asked again: "Why?"

"Because it is full of Englishmen."

Heine, I reflected, had given the same reason.

"But there are nice Englishmen," I said.

"They killed my parents," he answered shortly.

I was taken aback. How much, then, did he remember?

"We'll have a talk about that some time, shall we?"

"Some time?" he echoed.

"What are your main interests?" I asked, falling back, in desperation, on my manner for interviewing candidates. "I see you've got an engineering book there. Are you interested in engines?"

"I find them interesting," he answered.

"And books generally?"

"I like books. But I have not read much just now."

"You'd be glad to get some reading, then?"

"I like books," he said again.

"What kind of books? Poetry?"

(Again the question which examiners always ask, especially of well-built youths with Greyhounds neckties.)

"I like poetry," he answered; and added, surprising me: "very, very much. And music. But I have not read much just now."

Then he smiled. It lasted only for a second, but I shall always remember that moment, for it was the first time I saw Klaus's smile. If anything was still lacking to complete my determination, that curious little twist of the lips, that momentary lighting of his distant eyes, would have supplied it. If David failed in his sword dance between the Aliens Acts I would force the ship.

"I have lots of books in my house," I told him.

"Ah so, yes?"

But his eyes had started to wander about the cabin, as if inventorying the various items of nautical disorder.

"In London," I pursued.

He looked at me again, as if for the moment he had forgotten my presence.

"London? Yes, I have heard of London."

"Would you like to stay with me, just for a short time, if we could arrange it?" I asked. "You could have a nice, lazy time, read books, English and German books. We could hear some music, perhaps. There is plenty of music in London. You could hear Wagner, Beethoven. . . ."

"I thank you," he said, with his little bow. "It would be kind of you. But I am too busy. I thank you."

"But what do you intend to do?" I asked bluntly. "I mean—what are your plans for the future?"

"I do not know."

"You mean to go back to Germany?"

He hesitated. For the moment it seemed that the word "Germany" meant nothing to him.

"Nach Deutschland?" I said.

"To Germany? Yes, I suppose so." Then he added: "But not to the Abbey. No."

Only on two or three occasions—I have a distinct memory of each—had I felt so helpless. It was all I could do to control my temper, which had risen suddenly as it does when one has to deal with a stupid child or an obstinate horse. But I had still the sense to

realize that a single gesture of unfriendliness would damn my chances for ever. A saint or a psycho-analyst might have brought the boy round; perhaps a woman would have coaxed him—I longed for Peggy. For me the only course was retreat.

I said maladroitly: "Well, I must go now."

He came forward a little and held out his hand again. He said: "Good-bye!"

I answered: "Good-bye!" and opened the door. Turning again, I said: "But we must meet again. I am your friend, you understand?" (He nodded gravely, but without much conviction.) "Au revoir!"

He repeated: "Au revoir!"

As I closed the door I saw that he had taken up his book again.

On deck I found Kestel. David had gone, leaving a message that I was to meet him at a solicitor's office in Collingwood Street. Kestel was anxious for me to stay a few minutes, to drink more schnapps and smoke one more cigar. He would have liked, I think, to talk about Klaus; I too, but not at that moment, for my thoughts were not yet collected. I gave him my address in London, begged him to call on me, promised to write, and hurried away.

Somehow my confidence had gone. I had seen Klaus and he had rebuffed me. The mountain of difficulty which I had thought to remove by faith loomed up again in all its hideous immensity. The quays, the river, still lay in tranquil sunshine, but the sun had lost its power of benediction and I was conscious of the bleak wind. A negro ambling along the deck of a collier with mop and pail stopped to lean over the rail and grin at me. And no doubt he was only enjoying a piece of local colour, but I could almost believe then that his grin meant "Poor fool! You thought you'd only got to beckon to the boy——"

Having asked my way I turned up Sand Hill. "It's no good," I thought finally. "One can't get the better of the human element and the legal obstacles added together. I must break it to David that I've wasted his time."

The office was at the top of a flight of stairs to which one entered through a narrow opening between a tobacconist's and a Barclay's. I tapped at a window labelled "Enquiries," and a clerk took me straight through to Mr. Llewellyn's office. David was talking to a vulgar, red man with a bald head. He said: "This is Mr. Llewellyn," and Mr. Llewellyn gripped my hand flabbily, and sniffed, and cleared his throat, and offered me a De Reszke. No? Would I care for whisky? No? Would Mr. Holmes change his mind? To me he was polite, to David unctuous. I sat on a dining-room chair close

to the filing-cabinet while they finished their conversation, which was full of jargon and to me almost unintelligible. The man Llewellyn's servility, which I was forced to watch, and his arch manner of appealing to me every few seconds—"We have to go carefully these days, don't we, Sir John?"—did nothing to ease my impatience. I wanted to get David alone, to tell him frankly that I had made a fool of myself and wasted his time. I should be happier, then. At last Mr. Llewellyn rose. "I'm afraid," he said, fumbling with his ancestral watch, "—an appointment—you understand—the chief constable—but, please, stay here as long as you wish—cigarettes in that box——" His compliments were punctuated by David's staccato questions and instructions. "I'll let you hear soon if I want you to do anything," David said. "A mere linc, Mr. Holmes, and I shall be at work straight away. Any service. I make no promises, you will understand—but what can be done—very pleased to have met you, Sir John, and you, Mr. Holmes, good-bye, Mr. Holmes——" He gargled himself out of the room.

I took the chair opposite David's.

"What was that?" I asked, "a male midwife?"

He nodded solemnly.

"Yes," he said, "you might call him a legal midwife. But he's a clever fellow, that Llewellyn. He's done a job of work for me before. He knows everybody in this place, he knows his law, and he's no more scrupulous than a good, God-fearing man has to be. He's a virtuous man, mind, and he's no blackmailer, or I wouldn't be inviting him into this business. But if you wanted to prosecute the Archangel Gabriel, Llewellyn's the man who'd find the evidence."

"Well, I don't want to prosecute anyone," I said.

"Was it not the boy?" he asked sharply.

"It was, but——"

"Ah, that's fine!" he exclaimed. "I thought from your face you'd got the right lad, but when——"

"It's no good, David," I said. "We shan't get him."

He looked hard at me. Then he said slowly:

"I've had men standing up in front of me, right there, who to my certain knowledge have broken half the laws there are in the statute book. And I couldn't get them. Couldn't lay a finger on them. And more often than not they were men who had their education from a Salvation Army preacher and a wee book of dirty tales. So, if I'm not a better law-breaker than those poor scoundrels——"

He stopped, suddenly appalled at the way he had voiced the issue. I said again: "It's no good, I'm afraid. He just won't come."

"Won't come? Ah!"

He took out his diary and began making notes, copying in his tiny handwriting from a paper Mr. Llewellyn had left with him. Suddenly he glanced up at me again.

"Do you want to get him?" he asked, his voice challenging.

I said, after a pause: "Yes, desperately."

He said: "It'll cost you a lot of money."

"I don't care about that," I answered.

"I make no promises——" he said, echoing Mr. Llewellyn.

We were busy for the rest of that day; how busy, I only realized when I started to take off my clothes for bed. Not that I did any of the work myself. Indeed, David's suggestion—made without undue stress on my inadequacy—was that I should go to the hotel where he had left his things and amuse myself with *The Autocar* and *Commercial Transport*, punctuated by meals, until his return; but I did not feel that this would be perfect manners. At some of the interviews I was not actually present, David having deposited me, with his hat and coat, in the care of porters, and I spent what must have amounted to a total of three or four hours in cold waiting-rooms where there was not even an *Autocar*. When one long wait was promised I stole away to buy pyjamas, which were wrapped for me in thin paper with fine string, and which made wretched the rest of the morning's wanderings. David, in the meantime, was making what he termed "preliminary approaches." That was all the information he vouchsafed, and I did not trouble him for more, for work always intensified his taciturnity and a Watson does better to be silent at these times. I was of some use, however, in finding the way to each of the addresses he had listed, and in bullying the clerk at the reference library till she produced an up-to-date edition of a book on Immigration Law. ("Mr. Lacey would have a copy, no doubt," David said, "but he's not the man I propose to ask for the loan of it.") I also bought him a box of matches.

We paid another visit to Mr. Lacey, and when David came out of the office with him I thought Mr. Lacey looked even more worried than before. I asked, on the way downstairs: "What have you said to poor Mr. Lacey now?" and David chuckled. "Llewellyn has a wonderful memory," he said. We went to the German consulate, where David spent half an hour. A cable was sent to Berlin. He visited a magistrate, who at the end of the interview seemed almost alarmed by a new realization of the gravity of his responsibilities. And at last we returned to the hotel, for luncheon, I hoped, but only (as

it proved) that I might write letters, practically dictated by David, to be telephoned to friends of mine in the Home Office. Then the round seemed to begin again. To the post office to send off a lengthy telegram. To the library, so that David might refresh his memory on some detail (perhaps a ruling that had once been made on the meaning of the word "aforesaid"). Back to the German consulate to see if a reply to the cable had come through. Back to Mr. Llewellyn.

I wanted a meal, and David said "Yes, by all means," but for himself he had no time. I went half-way, with coffee and rolls, while he called on another magistrate. "If I wanted you to start a revolution for me, would it be as difficult as this?" I asked. "Starting a revolution is easy," he answered. "That's a routine matter, which we could entrust to the Civil Service. What you have asked me to do is tantamount to ordering a reconsideration of Magna Carta." Back again to Llewellyn. I suggested chartering a taxi for the rest of the day, but David was horrified. "You'll want all your funds for bribery," he said, "you can't afford to hire a machine which sits writing up its bills like an invoice clerk."

Our last visit—or one of our last, for I am no longer clear as to the precise order of events in that weary day—was to the prison, where the Governor pressed us to have dinner. To my relief, David accepted. The Governor, a Major Pewey, was an elderly man who had seen much life in South Africa and elsewhere, and who charmed me by his humour. I did not care for his wife, a Manxwoman much younger than he and (if I guessed rightly) more ambitious socially. David spoke little during dinner—I think he was more tired than he admitted—and we were kept going chiefly by the Governor's stories. He talked a little of his job, and grew angry about the stupidity of country benches, while David nodded sympathetically, and his wife, in pardonable boredom, fiddled irritably with her beads, her eyes fixed on her *marron glacé*. I fear that I paid Mrs. Pewey insufficient attention; my mind was too much occupied by her husband, who was a larger person. In the drawing-room, afterwards, I tried to make up for my discourtesy, and she talked about modern music quite intelligently. She was a 'cellist, she told me, but badly out of practice; she had lost her inclination to play. Her rather uncritical use of the words "good" and "sympathetic" upset me slightly. "We hardly ever hear good music in Newcastle," she said. But she was sensible about Stravinsky. In spite of my efforts to be attentive, my ears were constantly trying to catch what David was saying on the other side of the fire. "Llewellyn will be handling it," I heard, "and he will probably get Marchant. No, I thought of Conway, but his name would bring the case into the papers. I want to avoid

that . . . no, as you say, there may be no case; but as far as I can see, and from what Llewellyn tells me, the boy'll be sent to you for . . . they can't keep him at . . . perhaps longer . . . curious methods in these parts. . . ." "It was different," Mrs. Pewey said, "when we lived in London."

My sleepiness made politeness all the more difficult. While my hostess was telling me about her son, who was in his House Fifteen at Marlborough and in whom I would have been interested at another time, I had constantly to convert incipient yawns into nervous grimaces. Despite the warmth and comfort of the little drawing-room I was glad when we rose to go.

"I'll look after him if he comes to me," the Governor said as we parted. "I'll have him in my own quarters, if they'll let me . . . awfully nice of you . . . we haven't a great many friends here. . . ."

It was curious, I thought, that such richness could be wasted.

"I believe there are one or two people on the north side of the city we haven't called on yet," I said as we walked back towards our hotel. "We missed one of the houses in that long street leading from the barracks."

"You're quite correct," David said. "It was Number Fifty-seven. But I've made an appointment for you to be there at six to-morrow morning."

It was fine and frosty. The keen air roused me, and when we got back to the hotel we decided that it was too early for bed. Foot-sore as we were, neither he nor I were inclined to finish the evening in a stuffy lounge, where old men of devastating ignorance would be sipping their whisky and pouring their outworn philosophies over the problems of the day; nor could we, with our landsmen's modesty, invade a tavern in the mercantile quarter to hear brave stories from weather-beaten captains. So we turned again towards the river, and took up our station on the High Level Bridge, where we could watch the double traffic.

"At our time of life," David said, "we've no right to loiter in this dangerous night air. But we may survive if we stay for one pipe of tobacco."

The meal had revived, the air freshened him. We stood against the wind, which came up-river, scalding our faces, and from that natural air (for he was Edinburgh born of a sea-going father) he seemed to inhale vitality. He put his arm through mine, a rare gesture for one so undemonstrative; and remembering how we had once stood together thus at Iffley, feeling again the pride and affection of that moment in the pressure of his strong arm, I could fancy that a few years of the stifling law-courts had fallen away from him, that

he had forgotten for a moment the feel of his wig, as I the bare corridors of the Ministry. We were silent for a time when we had got our pipes alight, but presently he became communicative.

"I've led you a weary dance," he said, smiling, "but you were always a lazy fellow, and it'll have done you no harm. I'm told that they have to slip a penknife under your trousers to get you off your stool at the end of the day. It's no life for a man."

"There's a story——" I began, and the rumble of a lorry behind us drowned me. "There's a story," I repeated, as the noise subsided, "that once, when you were summing up for the defence in a breach of promise suit, the jury slipped away and had a bath and breakfast and——"

"That would not be permitted in a court of law," he contradicted.

"You see," he went on, "there's a number of folk might be brought into an affair of this kind. We had to stop all the gaps. You know how it is. There's a method they have for doing business in every part of the world, though it's nowhere quite so expertly managed as in English government offices. A case arises. Somebody has to do something. The first man picks it up, looks at it, consults his little book, and if it's quite straightforward he deals with it. He writes a letter saying 'With reference to yours of the 28th ultimo, I am instructed to advise you we have nothing further to add to our communication dated the 14th April. I am, Sir, Your obedient servant.' But supposing it's not as easy as that. Supposing that he's dealing with a man who owns a lawyer and a chartered accountant. There's likely to be a little trouble. He may have to use the wee bit of brain that the Almighty gave him. So he writes at the bottom, 'For the attention of Mr. Snipe,' naming one of his juniors, who can hunt for the appropriate text-book, or one of his seniors, who may regard the matter as important and pass it to someone else. That's what you have to guard against."

Goaded by a volley of petulant siren-blasts, the swing-bridge below us started slowly to turn. We could see the mast-head light of the ship waiting, and presently the bridge lights, moving gently forward. A galaxy of new reflections danced over the wrinkled water. The siren broke out again, in gratitude or triumph, and was answered, on a lower, more subdued note, by the horns of impatient drivers. The lights on the bridge began to swing again. "She's a Chinaman," a man behind me said, and a girl answered him: "Pinching our trade."

"She's bonny," David said.

Far away I could still hear the metallic clang that had overridden every other sound on the quay in the morning. My eyes were moist

with the wind, and my vision became confused, so that I could no longer distinguish the ships and houses. With David's arm still pressing mine, I heard his voice in my wind-stormed eardrums, as if a long way off.

"So there's not one of them who can regard him as just an entry in a book. It's no way of dealing with a human creature, to put him on a sheet and file him as if he were a case of smuggled tobacco. The regulations are no proper substitute for a little feeling. I tell you, John, I see it all day long, treating a poor fellow as if he were nothing but a premiss in a controversy. Well, unless I've been very careless there's no one they can hand this little matter to who won't have a nasty cold feeling that he'll be in the High Court if he doesn't take a little trouble. That's not saying that the law's not against us. But these little fellows are frightened out of their wits if you mention a few Acts that aren't quoted in their primers; and if they think that the Honourable Member for Babyville might ask a question in the House of Boobys they'll sign any document you like to put in front of them to keep his mouth closed. That's what Llewellyn will be doing. He'll have a nice bunch of documents ready for all the little policemen." He chuckled. "Man, if you'd seen Mr. Wingfield-Hewitt when I'd had my little chat with him. He thought I would have him straight into prison for his brutal treatment of a young man he'd never heard the name of before."

The thought of it made him laugh aloud, as I had not heard him laugh for years; and it was years, I suppose, since he had done anything quite so undignified as this day's work, had exploited with such zest the native qualities that would have made him a successful haggler in the stock or the cattle market. Regardless of the time and place, he began to describe his tactics in more detail. "Rousing the policemen," "a little harmless dovetailing of the Acts of Parliament," "a wee footnote at the bottom of the text, which the poor naturals hadn't noticed, and couldn't understand, till I explained it for them, and then maybe they understood it differently from the good man who drafted it." I tried to respond to his gusto, but I was too cold now to enjoy either his mirth or the kaleidoscope below and around me. "You'll catch cold," I said, "we must walk a bit." And since we had not the fortitude to see the night life of Gateshead we turned back towards the hotel. I rubbed my eyes and stared down the river once again, wondering if among the lights I saw beyond the bridge, dancing together, was the mast-head lamp of the *Arnhem*; still vaguely fearing that under cover of darkness she would slip downstream and that morning would find her high on the North Sea, with Klaus, locked in the Engineer's cabin, still turning the pages of his book.

"You're very quiet," David said. "It's been too much of a day for a man used to clerking."

But I was too lazy to answer him, and I let him give me the full benefit of his talking mood. He talked as he had once done in his rooms at Oxford, when we argued over Poor Law and Trade Unions until morning Chapel, incisively, without restraint, far more rapidly than in his ordinary speech, when he would pause for a quarter-second to choose the exact word. It was the legal aspect that he treated now, and he rolled glibly off his tongue weird terms, mixed Latin and Saxon, redolent of parchment, that are coined by drowsy pedants for the nimble lips of Scotsmen. *Prima facie* there were three loopholes, he told me. He enumerated and described them, piling pros and cons, dividing and subdividing, spinning out in linear sequence the massive architectonic of his thesis, like a Presbyterian minister leading his Sunday congregation through the formidable mazes of self-limiting Omnipotence. It was lost on me. His arm was still linked with mine, and I had no need to fear that with my senses sleepy and my vision still blurred I would walk off the pavement. His rich presence, native and virile, warmed me to a sweeter appreciation of the lamplit street, which was still crowded with people, still noisy with cars and voices, only the vulgarities curtained over. His voice, closer to my ear than the other voices, held round me a cloak of friendship in a city where I was stranger. What he said did not matter.

We missed our way, through my laziness and his exuberance, and we walked some distance down a street that was deceptively like the one we wanted. A church with a mosque-like dome made me realize the mistake and gave me a clue to our position. I undertook to find a short way back, and we turned into cross-streets which were less brilliantly lighted. Here, with less disturbance to quicken my senses, I had hard work to remember that I was guide, for David still walked at the even pace of one who knows his whereabouts. My sense of slackness increased, and with my perception still less occupied the sinister odours of the previous night stole back into my consciousness. Glasgow. Not the name, but the feel of its enclosing houses. Walking in a quiet street. A shuffling figure appearing at the next corner, assuming more detailed shape as the light fell upon it at each successive lamp-post. A man's face seen for a moment between the low brim of his hat and the upturned collar of his overcoat; the feeling of his eyes turned on me as he passed; the sound of his footsteps dwindling into silence. David beside me. A vague and futile objective.

We should win. It seemed impossible, but surely there was

confidence in his firm step and the ring of his eager voice. I wanted to win, ten times more passionately than I had desired it in all the weeks of waiting. Yet I was frightened. For the magician's service the young prince pays dearly. I had won before. My own astuteness, David's workmanship, had sent me back from Glasgow with my object achieved. A different object. But it was Klaus then who, in the moment of my victory, had defeated me. I saw his face now, in the dark entrance of a house on the other side of the street; the eyes, remote and incomprehensible. David had asked no questions, then or now. It was I who decided, I who reaped the reward of my decisions. Klaus's voice, with its attractive Teuton intonation. His little bow. "I am too busy." Was he mocking my pursuit, behind his impenetrable eyes? Was he only waiting to prove to me again that my whims meant nothing to his destiny? I heard David say, miles away: "I've never had a job of work I liked better than this one." I heard myself answer, as I squeezed his arm: "David, old man, I'm damned grateful."

Out of pure luck we came out of a narrow street right opposite our hotel, and I was praised for my cunning. I was glad to see the lighted windows, for I wanted now to be indoors, with stark electric brilliance to flood my senses with reality and banish the absurd phantasmagoria. We stopped on the threshold, and I had some difficulty in dissuading David from the pursuit of a plan he had just conceived: to pick up his things and move them to a house in another part of the town where he had been attracted by a notice advertising "Good, clean beds, 2/6." At this hotel, he argued, the beds were not advertised as clean. He yielded at length, however, and we went in and sat in the smoke-room, and drank brandy for our health's sake, and talked sleepily about boxing and unemployment, and smiled over old stories till the insinuating gestures of a waiter sent us to bed.

There was a train at eight next morning, they told us, and as part of the work was done we resolved to catch it, I with a view to being at the Ministry before closing hour, David (he said) to avoid arrest. Our rooms adjoined, and for at least half an hour after getting into bed I saw a light beneath the communicating door. David, I guessed, was at the writing-table making a précis record of the day's proceedings. The light was still showing (I believe) when I fell asleep. I slept deeply, without dreaming.

XII

My other legal friends assured me that David would not do it. They would back him to win any case, they said, where his client had a shred of evidence to support him; but in a court of law one had as a rule only to persuade twelve congenital idiots that one was honest (which all Scotsmen appear to the uninitiated) and clever (which in David's case was obvious). Here he was up against very simple statutes which everyone (except me) knew off by heart, administered by officials who did nothing else. "One can commit murder," they said, "and plead self-defence. One can commit perjury and plead absence of mind. One can blow up the Houses of Parliament and plead historical research. But one can in no circumstances whatever, unless one hold diplomatic office under a friendly Foreign Power, and be duly accredited, or be the lawful wife of such ambassador, member of ambassador's staff or retinue . . . enter this country without a passport. And you," they added, "who spend all day and every day signing certificates of fitness to enter and, if accompanied by an adult, be upon the premises of Madame Tussaud, hereinafter called the Modeller, must know that as well as we do."

Alas, I did know it. Their explanations, always confused by the outbreak of vigorous debate among themselves upon minor issues, were by no means clear to me. But in the main their unanimity was convincing enough. As the days went on I heard nothing from David. I ventured once to ring him up, but I was told that he was in Court, and a report in the next day's *Guardian* satisfied me that he was too busy to be bothered. I had to trust that Llewellyn was doing his work faithfully. I saw in Lloyd's list that the *Arnhem* had sailed for Hamburg. That was all the newspapers told me. There were several people in Newcastle to whom I might have written, but David had so warned me about the delicacy of the business that I feared to upset the course of things by doing so. I longed to go there again myself, but work prevented me. I had to be patient, and without David near me to nourish them my hopes dwindled.

David, however, did it. To this day the pundits, when I state the facts of the case as I understand them, assure me that I am talk-

ing rubbish. But the facts remain. By some miracle of manipulation an alien, of a lately enemy country, and having no record of desirable character to produce, was allowed to enter and remain in England.

The first cheerful message came from Major Pewey, in a letter which had been delayed through an error in the address. "You'll be glad to hear," he wrote, "that the young German in whom you are interested is here with me. Actually in my house. Technically he is a prisoner, detained at H.M.'s pleasure, and I have to keep his room locked. But by interpreting my instructions rather loosely I can keep him in my own quarters. I have put him on parole, and he is not the sort to break it as far as I can judge. I don't know how long I shall have him. I gather from indirect sources that Holmes has set on foot certain inquiries and that the young man's fate is not yet decided.

"In the meantime I'm glad to have him. He interests me. I don't remember an exactly similar case before (excuse the word 'case'!) but then, no two cases are precisely similar. He is very shy and reticent, absolutely mum about his recent history, which he either has forgotten or prefers not to divulge. It is evident that he has suffered terrible hardships and privation. He talks of his childhood in Berlin sometimes, and very vaguely about his parents. I can't gather whether they are both dead or not. You know, perhaps. He also talks constantly about a place he calls the Abbey, so spirit-haunted that I rather fancy it's entirely a figment of his curious imagination. His English is remarkably fluent.

"My wife—rather to my surprise, the boy's not handsome, you'll agree—is as pleased as I am to have him. He does odd jobs about the house, and isn't ashamed to sweep a room or even empty slops. (A surprise to me, I always thought the male German shunned every kind of housework.) He's most useful with things like bells and vacuum cleaners. His greatest asset (in my view) is that he's devoted to music, and my wife has begun to practise the 'cello again for the pleasure it gives him. . . .

"So far I have not let him come into contact with other strangers. He is (I should say) abnormally sensitive on the international question, and in this place, where the effects of the war seem to be felt worse every day, you can't rely on people to be always tactful. . . ."

A day or two later a note came from David. All he said was: "I think we shall pull it off. D. H." Next came a long envelope containing a bill. It was made out thus:

To expenses incurred in journey to Newcastle, board and lodgment thereat. (Two persons.) . . .	£	s.	d.
To solicitor's fees, (London and Newcastle). Fees at Somerset House, Stamp duty on various documents, payments to witnesses of doubtful integrity, gratuities to porters, to Customs House servants and officers, to the Home Secretary (including Dues of Denizen Rights) and to several policemen, also briberies, corruptions, and other wages of Sin	11	16	2
To Fee for Mr. Holmes's professional services (including time lost)	69	2	5
		6	8
	81	5	3

Credit. Sum lent by Sir John (then Mr.) Saggard to Mr. Holmes, in Cornmarket Street, Oxford, on some date not clearly remembered, and not hitherto returned

81 2 9

E. & O.E.

He had written across the bottom: "This is a pro forma invoice. Goods will be delivered on receipt of your remittance."

I threw the bill to Peggy, unable to speak for happiness.

She said: "There's a note attached. Did you see?"

She detached and passed it across to me. I read:

"My dear John,

"I'm afraid you'll think this is pretty steep. But honestly I had to go a long way round to keep myself out of it—which was necessary for my credit as a Benchet—and also to keep your brother out of it, as you wished. (I might have made a short cut if I could have brought him in.) A number of people helped, and charges do mount up, you know. There was an ex-officer I found, out of a job, who was willing to commit a little honest perjury to enable him to meet maternity expenses. So the money hasn't all gone to the undeserving.

"Look here, I'm flush at the moment. The indiscretions of a young nobleman are piling up the bawbees at my feet. Send

me a cheque for £25, and I'll feel more than repaid for spending a day's holiday in your company.

"Don't forget to burn this. It's the last bit of evidence against me.

"Yours affectionately,

"David."

I sent him a cheque for a hundred, crossed "a/c payee" and "God bless you."

Lanair, who is no lawyer, had constituted himself the leader of the Sceptical School, and when I told him how things were progressing his laughter could be heard all over the Museum.

"I've warned you before about that man Holmes," he told me. "If ever there was a crooked Scotsman with a long ghoulish dial wedged between a wig and a pair of spectacles—and that bill of his, my God! Let's see it again. There are eight million people in London, and most of them are mugs, but to find another mug who'd put down a cool hundred. . . ."

Next day I received another communication from David. This time it was a bulky document—thirty or forty pages of single-spaced typescript—on which he had written "Copies, for your interest. Originals filed Somerset House." It was a series of affidavits, sworn before a Guildford solicitor, the longest by one James Hethersett Pericault-Allen, described as "late Captain, Royal Signals, at present of no fixed occupation." This began in a formal manner, replete with references to other documents, each paragraph prefixed by its "Whereas" and developed into a narrative in which the very baldness of the prose only emphasized the extravagance of the story it enshrined. It had the mark of truth, because no inventor (one would have thought) could have arranged his facts with such contempt for likelihood. Yet it was (I believed as I saw where it was leading) a complete fabrication. Not of David's mind. He would have been incapable of anything so subtle in the art of counterfeit. Nor was it the work of a professional story-teller, an Orczy or an Oppenheim, for it had not the slick neatness which a practised hand would inevitably have given it. It read like pages in the biography of one of those rare persons to whom unlikely things happen at every turn in the road. And if I guessed rightly it had actually been drafted by a liar of some education, of no mean intelligence and no ordinary size.

My copy was destroyed in a recent holocaust, and I cannot remember the text well enough to give a transcript which would adequately convey its flavour. No doubt Somerset House, with its almost supernatural efficiency, would find the original for me; but

I deem it wiser to let the evidence be still, until the ink at last fades upon the parchment, for the arm of the law is said to be long, and that of conscience is hardly shorter.

Pericault-Allen (so this temerarious narrative informed me) had been a student at Heidelberg and Frankfort. During a walking-tour in the Bavarian Alps he had met a Miss Golding, whose mother was German and father English, and had married her out of hand. They had settled down in a village near Osnabrück, intending to return to England together as soon as the husband had completed a monograph on Friedrich Wilhelm II, for which certain material was only available locally. In the meantime a son was born, who was christened Klaus Golding. The completion of the monograph took longer than had been expected, and the boy was three years old when the father went to England to buy a house and make everything ready for the reception of his wife. At the wish of the mother, whose feeling was more German than English, the boy had been taught to speak both languages, and was being brought up in a German fashion as regards dress and domestic régime. The father, despite his admiration for German literature, had determined that when he grew a little older the son would be taught to recognize his English birth. On this one point there were strained feelings between the young couple. A few days after the father's arrival in England letters from his wife ceased. He grew anxious and hurried back to Osnabrück. His wife had disappeared and the boy with her. He searched in vain, and at last returned to England alone. His own parents were then still living, but he had hitherto kept his marriage secret from them as well as from his other relations and English friends. Much as he wanted their sympathy he saw no good reason, then, for telling his story. He continued to advertise under cypher in German newspapers and did not remarry. But the mystery was unsolved, and his marriage became almost a forgotten incident in his life. During the war he was captured and imprisoned near Elberfeld. (This part of the story, I guessed, was again partly true.) He escaped, only to be recaptured near the Dutch frontier. In the course of his escape he broke into what appeared to be a deserted cottage, and found living there, in one room on the top floor, an old woman who was slightly insane and a boy who bore an extraordinary resemblance to his wife. The boy had told him that he remembered the Catholic Cathedral at Osnabrück, and following up this clue he had frightened the old woman into giving him a garbled account of how she had taken over the boy from his dying mother and promised to hide him from his English father, whose name, as she remembered it, was Jacob Alden. The rest of the woman's informa-

tion, when he had sorted it out, tallied with the facts of his wife's disappearance. His recapture took place before he could pursue the matter. Soon after the war he had visited Germany and succeeded in finding the cottage. The boy, she then told him, had left her, saying that he meant to go to sea. She had had a letter from him, written from a hotel in Bremen. She had not replied, being, as she said, a poor scholar. And she was no longer much interested in the boy, who she thought had always been funny in the head. On this occasion she showed Pericault-Allen a trinket of some sort that had come into her possession with the boy's belongings, and this he recognized as having formerly belonged to his wife. He went on to Bremen, where he searched in vain. Months afterwards the proprietor of the hotel in Bremen wrote—to say that the boy had been seen in Peterhaven.

That, as nearly as I can remember it, was the outline of Pericault-Allen's statement, in which the detail was still more audaciously conceived than the framework. It was supported by the affidavits of fellow-officers and others, some of which may have been entirely true. It taxed credulity, but it was sufficiently watertight. Only the recovery of Klaus's memory could contradict it, and there was no reason to suppose that the matter would be re-opened, if, after the papers had been scrutinized by the A.E.D. (which I supposed they would be) a certificate of nationality had been granted. I wondered who in the A.E.D. had actually examined the papers. Well, they were perhaps accustomed to curious stories, and this was not a long way more incredible than the true one.

The next news came on a postcard:

“Please collect goods King's X train arriving 7.33 a.m. to-morrow, Tuesday. D. H.”

* * * * *

I wanted Peggy to come with me, but she said “Better not.” She was right, I think. He would be less scared if he met us one by one.

I took the Vauxhall, not realizing how busy the streets would be at that hour with market traffic, and underestimating the density of the fog, which increased as I drew nearer to the City. From Camden Town onwards I moved at a crawl, anxious and miserable with the cold, which numbed my fingers and discouraged my engine. For what seemed an hour I followed a fruiterer's cart piled high with baskets, not daring, with vision limited to a few feet, to swing out and overtake it. When at last I nosed my way into the station it was a quarter to eight.

The porters I asked, either stupid or merely sleepy, did not seem to know if the train was in, and reacting in the normal way towards a frantic and incoherent person they would take no interest in my questions. I was lucky, however. The fog had delayed the train as well as myself, and had thus given me five minutes' grace.

It was as cold in the station as in the streets, and almost as dark. The arc lamps showed like yellow suns, the roof was almost invisible, veiled by a film of dirty brown. The empty rails and the platform disappeared together into the darker fog outside. On the other side of the station an engine sneezed and panted fitfully, as if reluctant to venture into the open. The workaday noise struck oddly upon the occult scene, which had the feel neither of day nor of night, neither of indoors nor out. The few porters, ranged in irregular echelon at the edge of the platform, stared gloomily across the track and spat at it without force or intention. Behind them we welcomers stamped up and down, swinging our arms for warmth, with no word to say to each other. No one tried to sell things. No one whistled. In the vast yellow cave we moved like fish in an aquarium, ignoring our neighbours, speechless and apparently without purpose.

At the point where the rails disappeared the darkness coagulated into an advancing mass. With deliberate snorts and with infinite caution the engine felt its way towards the buffers.

The carriage doors swung open and a score of business men, spruce and wakeful, came down the platform. Other passengers, confused by sleepiness and accosting porters, descended more slowly, formed gradually into an untidy column and moved past me at a lifeless pace, cluttered with baggage and relations; elderly industrialists, scared provincials, Londoners drinking the fog with sentimental appreciation. I stood upon a trolley, glancing back and forth like a spectator at a game of tennis, terrified of missing my man. I thought I had done so, when the column dwindled into a ragged tail. Then I saw him.

I had not needed to worry. His height would have revealed him to me in the thick of the crowd. He had been in one of the rear-most carriages, and unlike an inexperienced traveller had taken his time in alighting. He walked now a yard behind a group of sailors, a few yards in front of the infirm or wealthy travellers who made the rearguard. He carried a small suitcase. He walked steadily, without haste and without dawdling, his eyes straight ahead. There was nothing in his manner, or in his face when he came nearer, to show that he was a stranger, or in the least confused by the bustle of the station, which with the train's arrival had become formidable.

I stood still, hoping that he would see and recognize me. Only when he had passed me did I run after and accost him.

I said: "Guten Tag, Herr Gotthold."

He replied, carelessly: "Guten Tag, mein Herr," and would have passed on without more than a glance at me, but I put my hand on his shoulder.

"You don't recognize me?" I asked. "My name is Saggard."

At the word "Saggard" he started, and looked at me closely.

"We have met—in the *Arnhem*," I reminded him.

It was plain that he had already recognized me, but he would not treat me seriously. He murmured: "In the *Arnhem*, yes," and picked up his bag.

"But you were told that I should meet you?" I pursued. "Major Pewey told you, surely."

He repeated: "Major Pewey."

I could have kicked him.

"He's a nice man, Major Pewey," I said, following up quickly. "You liked him, did you not?"

He agreed with this. "He is very nice. I liked him very much."

"He is a great friend of mine," I said with warmth, handling the facts tactically.

"Ah, so?" Again he picked up his bag. "Well, I must make haste," he said, and added, with his polite little bow: "Thank you!"

I stopped him, almost by force.

"One minute! Where are you going next? What do you mean to do?"

He replied, with the assured gravity that belongs only to Germans: "I go to seek for work in an engineering company."

"But you'll let me give you some breakfast first?" I pleaded.

"I shall find work first," he said, "and then have breakfast. I have had an *Imbiss* on the train."

"But it won't be easy to find work in this fog," I persisted, "unless you know your way about in London very well. Perhaps you do?"

"No, I do not know London," he admitted, stressing "London" as if it were one of forty or fifty towns which a tourist in Europe might chance to visit.

We were walking side by side now, and I was edging him towards the restaurant. Probably he had had nothing to eat since a few sandwiches in the train the previous night, and I could see that the reasonableness of my suggestion was becoming apparent to him. At the door of the restaurant he said:

"I shall have a little breakfast, perhaps. But I have money, thank you."

I have myself been pestered by English-speaking hotel touts in every city of any size from Warsaw to Gibraltar; but somehow I failed, at that moment, to recall the embarrassment and thus to sympathize with Klaus's suspicions. It was as well, perhaps, for I should then have pursued him with less spirit.

"I want breakfast myself," I said, held the door open for him, and followed him in.

He walked straight to a corner table, took off his hat, and sat down. I sat opposite to him. He turned his head a little and fixed his eyes on the door through which he had entered, so I was able to watch his face without causing him embarrassment. Good feeding had done much to alter his appearance—more than I should have thought possible in so short a time. He was decently shaved, and his hair had been trimmed—not by a prison barber. The flesh on his cheeks was firmer, his skin more healthy, and there was some colour in his face. (I wondered how much David had sent Pewey for expenses, and whether I could think of a decent Christmas present for Pewey's own youngster.) He had still the look of remoteness, of one who belongs to a different world and must make what use he can of the new one. But he was less frightened. Seeing him then for the first time a stranger might have asked me where I had found such a scarecrow; but with the engineer's cabin still fresh in my memory, I saw him almost as a pattern of normality. A young German student, *ernst*, hard-working, ready to talk about the times of the lectures, the date of the examinations, the importance of differentiation between the Self and the Noumenal Self in studying the *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft*, the place of basket-ball in physical culture; punctilious to the point of sheer silliness in matters of student etiquette; unexpectedly uproarious at supper-parties, quick-tempered. I thought of men I had known, Fleischmann, Willy Goertz, Petzoldt, who had lately re-opened correspondence with me, Dädelow. . . . The names no longer fell to the proper faces. Tall and short, fat and thin, dark and fair, they had merged now into a type of which I still knew the colour. Lovable people. That type, I supposed, existed no longer. I saw its reflection in the youth who sat mute on the other side of the table. Yet he was not, as I closely regarded him, the true type; a perversion of it, the essence distilled and joined to other elements. The reflection was enough; it stirred a memory of friendships, that had been locked away too long. I looked at his clothes, and they were the clothes of a student. I wondered how far they had been his own choice, and how far Pewey's. His tweed

coat was rather too square in the shoulders; it would have been smarter in 1910. He had dark grey trousers, of a sensible thick flannel, strong shoes, and thick woollen socks. The white soft collar was of unfashionable shape. The tie he had almost certainly chosen himself. It was a knitted tie, dark blue with foolish thin horizontal stripes of red—no Englishman except a coster or a distinguished scientist would have worn it. His clothes were not put on quite rightly. They made him look much younger than he had appeared in his seaman's garb, more outlandish, and much more likeable. Charles, I reflected, had had just that coltish aspect in his Cambridge days. I hoped that Peggy would not be too precipitate in smartening him.

"Mawinser."

A few other travellers had straggled in and taken their places at the tables, as far from each other as possible, and the news had reached a waiter, who now stood before us, sleepy and shiny, as if he had only just sponged the remains of the lather from his face. I nodded towards Klaus, who asked for bread and coffee; in correct English, but the accent was enough to convince the waiter that he was being addressed in a foreign tongue. He asked: "Pardon, sir?" and Klaus repeated his order. The waiter bent closer to catch his words, and Klaus grew rattled.

I said: "Will you get coffee, and rolls, and butter, and some cold sausage in slices, and tomatoes if you have any, for this gentleman. For me, porridge, followed by eggs and bacon."

From the departing waiter Klaus's gaze turned to me.

"And now," I said boldly, "about your work. It's difficult to find work in London these days. Have you any addresses to go to?"

He looked rather blank, fumbled in his pocket, and pulled out a piece of paper. He opened, looked at it, and was about to put it back.

"May I see it?" I asked.

Reluctantly he let me see the paper, on which Pewey had written a name and address for him. Mine.

"That's fine!" I said. "I'll see if I can find you a job."

I think that from that moment his hostility—or shyness—was partly broken down. I am inclined to believe now that his fear of me was based upon the notion that I was an official of some kind in plain clothes; I had played my cards badly, had not said sufficient to explain why a stranger should be so much interested in him. At the time, I was afraid that there was in his attitude something that is called 'psychic,' an intuitive animosity. Perhaps that element in our relationship was contributed only by my own nervousness; for I had not yet become accustomed to perceiving in flesh and blood the Klaus

whom Heinrich had created for me. We had still a long way to go before we found ourselves in step.

The coffee warmed and comforted us, eased our shyness. He said nothing of his own accord, but he gave me straightforward answers to my questions, which were all about his most recent days. Yes, he had liked Major Pewey, and Mrs. Pewey had been kind, "but I did not know her so much." Taking a risk, I went back as far as the *Arnhem*, and mentioned Kestel's name, at which he brightened. Kestel, he said, was a very kind man. He intended, when he had seen England for a few days, and made a little money, to go back on Kestel's ship.

"To Peterhaven?" I asked.

"On Captain Kestel's ship," he repeated, and I did not press my question.

"You are not staying in England long, then?"

"No," he said firmly, "I do not like England."

"But it's not always like this," I said. "The sun shines sometimes. And we have fifty different kinds of scenery, each of them perfect. You can't see everything in a few days. Are you fond of the country?"

"Some of the country," he answered precisely.

He was eating voraciously, and as soon as I could get the waiter's attention I ordered further supplies. I look back upon that eating-place with gratitude as one that gave me splendid value for my money. When he had done I gave him a cigarette, which he smoked appreciatively. We remained at the table until it was finished, for these were moments too warm to be thrown away. I sat smiling at him, and those at neighbouring tables must have thought I was a lunatic of some harmless kind. Once, when Klaus caught my eye, he answered me with a momentary smile.

He came with me to the car in a docile fashion. By this time the station was astir with suburban passengers to the city, men and women who drove in intersecting streams towards their destinations, leaving more casual traffic to thread its way through them as best it could; and Klaus, I think, began to realize that without a guide he would be helpless. The Vauxhall, as I had expected, was sulky at having been left so long in the cold, and although I had put a rug about her vitals she refused to fire even when I viciously cranked her. Klaus watched me for a second or two, and then opened the bonnet. I do not know what he did, but a moment later, when he pressed the self-starter, she started. He held the throttle half-open till I had taken my place.

"And where did you learn about cars?" I asked him.

"At the Abbey," he said.

It must, I thought, have been a good Abbey.

I smile when I think of that first drive we had together. If Klaus expected the London of European tradition, a city in which the sun is never seen, he was not disappointed. The fog had only thickened while we breakfasted, and it was now denser than any I had seen for years. I drove in second gear, frequently dropping to first, in the wake of an omnibus when there was one to follow, and crawling, when I lost it, with my tyres almost touching the kerbstone. Once, when the kerb deserted me to follow a piffing side-street, I found myself on the wrong side of the road, and was cursed good-humouredly by a taxi-driver who stopped his vehicle with his mudguards within a foot of mine. Twice I unknowingly turned from my road, and on the second occasion I became completely lost. Klaus, seated bolt upright, was turning his head from side to side, like an earnest tourist absorbing his money's-worth of scenery. Halfway along what I judged to be a residential street I stopped and confessed my helplessness.

"I'm afraid I'm lost."

He nodded gravely.

"What place do you seek?" he asked politely.

"Hampstead."

"We may, perhaps, have passed it," he suggested. "One cannot see easily when it is so misty."

A policeman, however, informed us that if we had, as we said, come from King's Cross, we had probably not passed it. And aided by his directions we got back on to the right road.

After that we stopped at every doubtful crossing, and I reconnoitred on foot before proceeding. I was afraid, each time, of not being able to find my way back to the car. Several times I apologized.

"I'm afraid we're making a slow journey. I hope you're not too cold."

"It is not too cold, no," he said. "It is difficult, I think, to find the way in London. I am glad to be with a gentleman who knows the way."

There was no sarcasm in his voice; and had he been really bitter I would have forgiven him, for his very presence was enough to keep my spirits high. But by the time we reached Church Row I was a good deal humbler.

* * * * *

The success with which Klaus had exercised his personality upon my carburettor had started an undercurrent of thought, or encouraged an undercurrent already started.

I was myself, at that time, the owner of an engineering business. Not, it is true, a business of any great importance; to be exact, a filling station and repair shop on the Edgware road, in that hybrid area which is still known locally as Pasture Village. I was hardly fitted even for so modest an enterprise, but about the time when I first conceived it I ran into Hugo Bennet, and it was he who enabled me to assume the rôle of industrialist. He was a nice fellow, who had been with me in the war. He had been scientifically educated, by a mother who bleated in the outer circle of the Fabians; but was none the worse for it, and his only mental weakness was a passionate interest in tappets, camrods and such absurdities. When I met him, in Ludgate Circus one evening, he was very thin and unnaturally cheerful. I offered him a drink, and he wanted to pay for it. I guessed, from the way his hand went to his pocket to count the coins, that he was in the same case as many others, and I gradually dragged the facts from him. Till recently, "a few weeks ago" as he put it, he had had a job.

"No, not engineering. Mathematical work of a sort. One stood by a desk and a fellow called out figures and one wrote them down. They gave me twenty-five bob a week, and I must say I thought it was dam generous considering the work. But I made a fool of myself one day. The fellow said he had called sixty-five. I'd written down sixty-nine and I swore that was what he'd called. I had my rag out, I don't know why, and when he argued I biffed him. So then they picked the man from the front of the queue outside. I didn't blame them. (Well, it's good of you, but mayn't I pay for yours, sir?) It's odd the way one goes off over nothing, now and then. . . ."

It seemed to me all wrong that a born engineer should be wasted, and I made him manager of the outfit I was about to buy. He did very well. Allowing for interest and depreciation I was only forty-three pounds down at the end of the first three months. For the six months now ending there was some chance, Bennet told me, of his showing a profit, and I was hoping to raise his salary to something nearer a decent figure. He was supporting on his earnings a wife he had married during a short leave; a pretty girl who had somehow saved her own looks and her husband's sanity; a militant communist whose creed I thought imperfectly reasoned, but whose heart was beautifully kind. The couple lived in a cottage adjoining the shop. I believe that they were too hard-worked to be anything but fairly happy.

Bennet would do anything to please me. I was not sure if he would welcome an assistant, who would take away all chances of his

showing a credit balance for some time to come; for he was proud of the book-keeping, which he and his wife managed between them. But the company was young. I could talk about extension of premises, some modest advertising, the importance of ambition. . . .

I spoke tentatively to Klaus of my plan in the course of the morning, and he seemed to think that it would suit him. Plainly he had no plans, no ambitions, only the righteous desire to earn a fair wage; but it was also evident that he shared Hugo Bennet's peculiar love for the smell and feel of engine oil. The only part of his life-history which he had voluntarily told me was of how the chief engineer of the *Arnhem* had shown him the engines.

He was still bewildered. I had shown him his bedroom, which Peggy had prepared for him with a wealth of little comforts; a new warm rug for him to step on when he got out of bed; a shelf of books, German and English poets, Anderson's "Lives of the Artists," easy fiction; flowers on the little dressing-table and on the table by his bed. I had shown him my own study and invited him to take his pick from the shelves, where I had a fair amount of modern German work. To me this pleasure, which cost nothing, was tremendous. Perhaps it was thoughtless and unkind so to dazzle him with the glories of my little house when he still hardly knew me. But I did not then understand the mind before which I was performing, and when a man's fund of conversation has run out he can only fill the gap by displaying his little treasures. Eventually, when I had shown him everything, and he had assented politely to my showman's patter but refused to interest himself in anything but a rather bad Ruisdael landscape in the drawing-room (which he said was "very, very beautiful") I was forced to broach the topic of work, though I had intended to leave this till later; and again he gave easy assent to my suggestions. He thanked me, it would do very well. Yes, he liked to examine motor-cars and to improve them; he had not had much experience, but he would rapidly acquaint himself with the newer models. "I shall know presently how all the motor-cars are constructed," he said seriously. Perhaps he would. But I still had a feeling that as soon as he could shake me off he would make his own plans.

I was relieved when Peggy came in from her shopping; amazed at the ease with which she tackled Klaus. She called him at once by his Christian name, concealed any surprise she may have felt when he kissed her hand, and for the rest behaved exactly as if she were welcoming a nephew whom she knew well but had not seen for some

time. I left them together while I rang up the Ministry to ask if anything of urgent importance had come in; and when I returned they were conversing easily. Peggy, with tactics which looked obvious as soon as they were demonstrated, was talking of her own interests, ignoring completely the desert of surmise which was all our knowledge of his, and before they had been together more than a few minutes he was actually expressing an opinion on matters of dress.

"A lady should wear dark dresses," he said, "and there should be no violent contrasts. All the colours should blend."

"But I like bright colours and violent contrasts, white and scarlet, dark blue and bright yellow," Peggy objected.

(I should have mildly agreed with Klaus, whatever my opinion.)

"It is possible for some ladies to look correct in all colours," was Klaus's verdict.

The compliment was not subtle; but I reflected, with shame and amusement, that I had never said anything so polished to my wife or to any other woman.

"I'll show you some fashion-books after lunch," Peggy said.

I was quite prepared, when she said so, to find Klaus poring over them in happy absorption.

I had hoped that we would be alone for luncheon, but I was not sorry when Elaine Chelcote arrived, for I could never be sorry to see her. The fog was depressing her, she said; she could hardly see across the studio, and Benozzo was in one of his really bad moods, tearing up everything she did before it was properly started. "So I jumped on the tube," she said, as if no one before her had ever thought of so wild an action, "and came rushing up here to be comforted." But I doubt if anyone had ever troubled to comfort Elaine.

Before introducing her to Klaus I told her something about him: that he had lived through some of the worst days at Birnewald, that he had come to England as a stowaway, having lost his memory, and that I had run across him in Newcastle. "That's all there's any need to know," I said, and she understood me perfectly. Her meeting with Klaus was, I thought, rather charming. They were both such grave young people. He kissed her hand, and she, so naturally that it might have been her ordinary manner, gave him a little curtsy.

She asked: "You're staying with Aunt Peggy, are you?" He made no reply, but she said, "How clever of you to find the nicest people in London to stay with."

"And you?" he asked presently, "you live here?"

It was the first time, I think, that I heard him ask a question.

"Practically," she told him, with her grave smile. "At least, I live with another girl in a studio in Bloomsbury, but I'm always here."

He did not quite understand her, but he said: "That is very agreeable."

Soon they were talking about studios.

"You never told me if you enjoyed Mihailovna that evening," I said to Elaine at lunch.

She nodded, her mouth full of fish-cake.

"Lovely," she said. "She was sweet. I was sorry you couldn't come."

"She'd be pleased," I said, "if she heard your ripe criticism of her work."

"What did I say?"

"You said she was sweet."

"But——"

"And if I said that your work was 'sweet'——"

"But, Uncle, you're always picking me up for things I don't mean. When I said——"

"You're insincere, like all—"

She put her hands to her ears.

"If you, of all people, start talking about 'the modern girl'——"

"I wasn't going to. I was only going——"

"Stop quarrelling, you two!" Peggy ordered.

"And besides," Elaine continued, "she was sweet. She's quite different from the usual *première danseuse*. She hasn't got calves like iron cables and thighs like tree trunks. Has she, Aunt Peggy?"

"As far as I remember, no."

"And in one of the dances she came on stark naked."

"Did she?" I asked Peggy.

"She was wearing shoulder-heel white tights," Peggy said, "and was properly equipped with breastplates and jewelled fig-leaf. I regretted them but——"

"What did Lanair think of them?" I asked.

"And you," said Elaine, "who set yourself up as a highbrow——"

"What nonsense——!"

"——do nothing but talk about whether she was naked or not. The nice thing was that she looked naked. She was lovely."

I was glad that her father was not present. His views on nudity were definite.

"So she was lovely. Well, I'm beginning to learn something. And what did Lanair think of her?"

"I don't know."

"Did neither of you ask him?"

"Aunt Peggy did. She said 'Doesn't she remind you just a bit of Isadora?' and Major Lanair said 'I suppose the fellow who made this place had previously been a designer of kangaroo perches. A kangaroo'd get himself very comfortably on to this damned bench.'"

"Lanair always grumbles over entertainments I pay for. Did he really say nothing about Mihailovna?"

"Yes, he did once. In the middle of the Welcome to Flora he said 'My God, that woman is restless!' Four or five highbrows got up and stalked out of the theatre. Mildred Green among them."

"Oh, was Mildred Green there?"

"Yes, but she wouldn't look at me."

"Why, because of Lanair?"

"No, because of Benozzo."

"Benozzo?"

"Yes, she told me to give him up."

"Why ever?"

"Well, she sat under him herself once. And he used to say to her, as he always does to me, 'All ze young ladies zink zese days dat zey are ze Michael Angelo.' Then when he'd had her for about a week, he said, 'If you'll be zo vare good as to leave me your body in your vill, Signorina, I vill cut off ze fingers and use them for stuffing up ze holes zat ze rabbit make in my garden.' So now Mildred says that Benozzo knows as much about art as a Franciscan friar knows about camiknickers."

Peggy said: "Elaine!"

"I'm sorry. Mustn't I——?"

"We were talking about Lanair," I said, "and I was about to say that you must be careful of that man. He's a homewrecker."

"I think he's rather sweet——" (Peggy and I exchanged glances) "but really we were talking about Mildred Green."

"Yes, well let's stop talking about her. I'm reasonably broad-minded, but——"

"But do you think there's anything in what she says about Benozzo, really?"

She gazed at me in earnest enquiry, half-hoping, I think, after Benozzo's many sarcasms, that I would declare him a fraud.

"Temple Taylor says he knows his job. That's why I got him for you."

"Some more, Klaus?" Peggy said. "More vegetables? Are you sure? Then do you mind ringing the bell, it's just behind you."

"He's not the cleanest artist in London," I admitted. "In appearance, I mean. His work's clean enough."

"But he doesn't work. He just roams about smoking his dirty little cheroots and saying 'Zat is a nice leetle picture in ze English style. Click, cluck, ftoopf!' and away it goes into a corner among the rags and wine-bottles. Still," she added, "he's rather a dear in his way."

It would be all right, I reflected, so long as she did not tell him so, in the soft, pretty voice that made even her tritest remarks charming. For whenever I thought of Elaine and Benozzo together I had an unhappy vision of Elaine's father, whose multifarious interests kept him under siege in Sheffield, but who might on any terrible day take a trip to town to see how his beloved child was progressing. "I don't know anything about painting and that sort of thing," Chelcote had told me—"Or anything about Elaine," he could have added truthfully—"but if Elaine's set her heart on that sort of thing I don't mind her being taught. It must be a first-class teacher. Or a good school—there's a place called the Slade, isn't there? But I expect private coaching would be better. Personal attention, I s'pose that's the best. I don't care what I pay." And Benozzo, to whom Taylor sent me, did not seem to care what he received. His pupils paid him (as he told me frankly) in wine, beer, cigarettes, socks, shirts, or anything else they could muster. "And the ladies," he added, "they sometimes run up a big bill and pay in kind at the end of the month." I made it clear, however, that the lady of whom I spoke would pay in Treasury notes, and I impressed on him the fact that the suggestion of any other contract would get him into gaol the next day. "That is perfectly understood, Signor," he said courteously. "His own work's second-rate," Taylor had told me, "but he can break in a colt better than anyone I know. He understands line as a bird understands flight." So I thought I was doing my best for Chelcote, who in his heart of hearts would have been better pleased had his daughter shown for shorthand the enthusiasm that she lavished on etching.

"And then what sort of meal do you have in Germany at midday?" Elaine was asking. "You call it *Mittag*, don't you? It isn't true, is it, that Germans don't eat anything but sausages?"

As for Elaine herself, I could not be sure if she were satisfied

with the tutor I had found her. She did not mind Benozzo's disgusting appearance and manner of life; I had been afraid that a creature so demure, so neat in dress and quiet in manners, would have been shocked by the dark, greasy, lascivious little artist. But she had some of her father's toughness, as well as the sensibility bequeathed to her by some forgotten ancestor. She found Benozzo amusing—as a man. Moreover, she admired his skill, the ease with which he would jerk his pencil across her sketches, carelessly putting in the right line where she had laboured to draw the wrong one. But his sharp tongue constantly hurt her, and she groaned under the drudgery he inflicted, refusing to let her use anything but a pencil. I was sadly afraid that her patience was wasted. She etched exquisitely, and Peggy (to mention only one among her admirers) thought that she was a Goya. I hoped that they were right, but nothing she had done seemed to me to show a mind capable of first-rate work.

"But I'm awfully interested to know," Elaine pursued. "You see, I know all about French people, and what they wear and how they live" (she had spent a fortnight in Tours), "but I really don't know anything about Germany. You see, having been cut off all that time by the ghastly war one didn't have a chance. I suppose really it's all very much like England?"

Klaus put down his fork and stared at her, his lips preparing for speech.

"You must take Klaus for a jaunt one day," Peggy said. "There are lots of things in London he ought to see."

"Yes," I agreed, "the Zoo, and the—British Museum, and—what's the other thing there is?—the—"

"Germany is not like England," Klaus pronounced. "And German people are not like English people."

"In what way?" Elaine asked, her eyes intent on his face.

"They are not cruel," he said simply.

"Elaine, ring for the cheese, will you, there's a dear?"

"You know," I said, "Klaus and I got lost no less than five times coming here from King's Cross. It was funny, wasn't it, Klaus?"

"It was amusing," he said, without conviction.

Elaine, covering her indiscretion as best she could, played the new topic hard, and with Peggy and me supporting her in relays kept it up till the meal was finished. I could see that she was upset by her *faux pas*. As soon as possible Peggy took her off to the drawing-room.

I decided to tackle Klaus at once.

"I think you ought to be careful," I said as I lit his cigarette, "when you're talking to English people. You know, there are decent ones, as well as rotters. We want to be decent to you, and—well, you must be as responsive as you can."

Directly the words were out of my mouth I regretted them. I had used half a dozen idiomatic phrases, words no foreigner could be expected to understand, and I was now hopelessly involved.

He said: "Again, please?" and listened patiently while I laboured to translate my meaning into simpler terms. He understood at last, but his response was only stubbornness.

"I do not like the English," he repeated. "I have been warned—you cannot trust them. I do not want to stay in England."

"Let's go to the drawing-room," I said. "They'll have some coffee for us."

I left him with the ladies while I telephoned to Bennet—I was anxious now to get things settled quickly. Mollie Bennet answered the telephone, and I asked her how was business. She said: "Splendid. Two punctures between nine and eleven this morning." I accused her of laying tacks on the roadway, and she said that some of the Daimlers passing made her want to.

"And how's Hugo?"

"As usual. Absent-minded and happy."

"Can I speak to him?"

"If you'll wait a minute. He's attached to the clutch-plate of an old De Dion Bouton and he's inches deep in oil."

"I don't mind," I said. "Drag him out."

Presently I heard Hugo's patient voice:

"Is that you, Captain?"

"It is. I hear you've had two punctures this morning. Well done!"

"Good enough!" he said, "but with this fog I was hoping for something bigger. I hoped some cars would smash themselves right up."

"That's the business spirit," I said. "Look here, do you remember Heinrich Gotthold?"

"The poor devil we shot?"

"Yes. I've got his son staying with me. But you're not to know it's his son, c'est compris? You've forgotten all about Heinrich. You're absolutely clear on that point, aren't you?"

I heard nothing for a few seconds. I guessed that his hand was over the mouthpiece and that he was saying to Mollie: 'Old Saggard's gone clean off his rocker now.'

"Are you still there?" I demanded.

"Present and correct, Captain. Gotthold incident entirely forgotten."

"Good! Now the boy—Klaus Gotthold—he's a nice lad, a bit queer, suffering from almost total loss of memory, detests anything and everything English, otherwise very lovable. You'll like him. He's a nut-and-bolt-wallah like yourself. Now I wonder if you can find odd jobs for him. No, the financial aspect won't arise, I'll send you the amount for wages each week, and he'll board with me here. You can? I'm awfully grateful!"

I was not sure if he had taken in all I said—his voice was one that never recovered from translation into electricity—but I could rely on Mollie to straighten things out for him.

Crossing the hall I met Lanair.

"I just wandered in," he explained.

"It's odd," I said, "we were talking about you at lunch."

"It's not odd," he replied, "everyone in London's talking about me. Is lunch over?"

"Yes."

"Damn!"

"You might find something in the kitchen. There's some cold mutton, rather old."

"It's all right," he said. "I've brought sandwiches. I always do when I come here. Where's Peggy? Why aren't you treading the turnspit?"

"Day off for good conduct. Why aren't you?"

"Two years off for blinkin' impertinence. Gasper? What were you saying about me? Scandal?"

"Nothing to your credit. I was asking how you liked Mihailovna. You never told me."

He became suddenly enthusiastic.

"That dancer? My God, John, she was amazing. I've never seen a dancer with such brains. You didn't know what you were missing or you wouldn't have sent me."

"Come along to the drawing-room," I said, "we can talk about it there. I've got a surprise for you."

"Where?"

"In the drawing-room."

"Not one of your ghastly relations?"

"No."

"Woman?"

"Yes, one woman, and——"

"I don't expect a seraglio. Name and number?"

"Miss Chelcote."

"Ah! that's excellent. She's quiet. She's not one of these roaring tomboys you usually lead about. Take me to her and then move away."

"——and someone else."

"Who?"

"Klaus."

"God! You got him, then! That man Holmes, did he do it?"

"He did."

"Well, I'm damned glad. I want to see him. In the drawing-room, is he?"

"You'll go gently," I warned him. "He's a sick man. Mens not yet sana——"

"Don't burble Greek at me!" he said tersely, and opened the drawing-room door.

We found Elaine and Klaus side-by-side on the sofa, Elaine showing a portfolio of sketches. Lanair, almost before he had been introduced, placed himself between them.

"You come from Berlin?" he said to Klaus. "The last time I was there, that was in 1913, I had a very odd encounter with the police."

"If this is the story you usually place in Philadelphia," Peggy said, "we'd rather not hear it. It's not due till next Wednesday."

He turned to me.

"Will you put your wife in another room, please? As I was saying, the last time I visited the city of Cairo. . . ."

He had an arm round the shoulders of each, as if they were children, and neither appeared to resent it. Sitting on the floor, with my back against Peggy's chair, I watched them remotely. The fog had drifted into the room through one open window, and with the tobacco-smoke as reinforcement it clouded the ceiling. Across the faces of the three on the sofa the firelight flickered. I threw on another log and glanced up at Peggy. Her eyes were towards the sofa. I saw her face in semi-profile, suddenly grave. She was not listening to Lanair, only watching Klaus, and occasionally her glance shifted to Elaine's face. Her lips were together, very steady, her thoughts might have been a long way off. Her hair was rather untidy, and I could see the fineness of it in a spray that curved out from her forehead, defined against the white mantelpiece. I looked away into a dark corner and then to Elaine, her face turned towards Lanair's, and back again to my wife's face, quiet, still, perfect.

A moment that stood by itself, exquisite, to be remembered but not to be repeated, took its place in the column of time; and my thoughts, which upon the impulse of a new beauty had raced into

extravagant surmise, were caught by the swiftly flowing stream of Lanair's voice. My eyes turned to Klaus, who was labouring frantically to keep pace with the English, and I began to understand what Lanair was saying:

" . . . the front door, and there was a policeman there, and each of the windows, and there were two policemen at each, and the back door, and Matilda what's-her-name was standing there holding the broomhandle above her head. By that time Michael was as restive as a tom-cat. 'You're sure this is your friend's house?' he said. 'Well,' I said, 'Number Fourteen was the one he said it was.' 'You don't think it was his size in boots he was telling you?' Mike said. 'I'm certain this is quackduck's house,' I said firmly. 'Then by the holy whiskers of the prophet Mohammed,' he said, 'does he owe all these people money?' Thereupon, thereupon, mark you, he gave me the nastiest look I've had since I put turpentine in my Aunt Louisa's whisky at the age of four, and stalked off into the West Central. The next thing I heard was the crash of a brick coming through the window of the above-mentioned domestic office, and a voice like a volcano shouting: 'Who the hillock's that in there?' or words to that effect (Keep still, please, it all ends happily!) and then I heard Michael squeaking out in a little tiny voice like a choirboy's, 'You can't come in here. I'm doing my duties.' However, I got hold of the telephone, and——"

"That's enough, please!" said Peggy.

"But it gets much cleaner as it goes on," Lanair protested.

"You're a low fellow, Lanair," I said sternly. "Elaine's blushing all over."

She was, in fact, red with the heat of the fire.

"How do you know?" he asked. "I will now tell you a completely wholesome story of what happened when I was working on a schooner in the Sea of Bosphorus."

But Klaus interrupted him.

"You and your friend," he asked patiently, "you had by error entered the wrong house?"

"You mustn't try to follow my friend's stories too closely," I said quickly, as Lanair turned his eyes to the ceiling. "He is not quite right in the head."

Elaine said: "I'll explain it all to you when he's gone, Klaus."

I was delighted by her easy use of his first name.

"Is that what your nurse teaches you to say to a fellow-guest?" Lanair demanded.

"You can stop another ten minutes," Peggy said, "if you behave nicely."

Actually he stayed (after a short time behind the sofa, making penitent noises) till half-past three. He would not have been easy to get rid of—had we wished him to go—when there was a pretty girl about. And he told at least four more stories. Klaus seemed to warm up to him, and I caught him demurely smiling; not that he could understand much of what Lanair said, which was in all the English dialects and many of his own invention, but evidently he found something droll in Lanair's face, in the extraordinary range of expression which he achieved by only the slightest movements of his broad, lipless mouth. I was surprised, for I had not thought that Lanair's special genius in comedy would cross national borders; and I remembered then, with a little shock, that Klaus inherited two traditions.

When Lanair rose to go Elaine said she must go too. ('But separately,' I begged, 'the man's not to be trusted!') Peggy pressed them both to stay for tea, but Elaine had promised to meet a friend at the Marble Arch Pavilion and Lanair had, he said, to attend a sewing-circle. I took him away to get his coat, and as soon as we were outside the room he showered me with questions about Elaine. "She grows on me," he said. I told him he insulted the girl—he was the only man who had not fallen head-over-heels at the first glimpse. "I did," he said, "but I meant to keep off. It was just my damnable luck meeting her again." I was not sure if he were wholly frivolous. No other man had suffered so easily, so frequently, and so severely from a broken heart; and Elaine, all unconscious, was disturbing male tranquillity every day. "You'd better keep miles away," I said, "she's not your woman."

I was waiting to hear what he would say about Klaus, and I almost feared that he would disappoint me. But as he was putting on his gloves he said suddenly:

"He'll be all right, that boy. He'll come round, don't you worry. He's got decent stur' in him. I like him. I'm damned glad you found him."

He had filled his pipe, and he stopped talking to light it. I did not expect him to say more, but turning to face me he said seriously: "I wish I'd had a hand in the business. A lawyer's job, of course." Then, "But it must have cost you a devil of a bit."

"It was worth it," I said.

His hand had gone to his breast pocket. With a very quick movement he transferred two ten-pound notes from it to mine.

"Buy your wife a bun," he said, using the formula with which he tipped waiters.

Before I could protest or thank him the drawing-room door

opened. I heard Elaine say: "Well, you'll promise, won't you, to come and have tea with me in my studio. You go straight through to Tottenham Court Road, then get a bus——" and Peggy: "It's all right, I'll explain it."

"Goodbye, James," she said to Lanair.

Lanair, shaking her hand, said thoughtfully: "How do you do? I remember your great-grandfather when he was a fishmonger," and went away.

Elaine came downstairs in her short sable coat, and I walked with her to the station.

"You're all right?" I asked her, as we waited. "Quite happy in London?"

She said: "Awfully."

"If Benozzo bullies you too much I'll find you someone else," I told her. "But I know you don't want a select academy for young ladies. One doesn't learn anything at those places."

She agreed: "No. That's the sort of place Daddy meant me to go to. He's no idea, poor dear. I'm awfully glad you found me Benozzo. He is real."

"You like people to be real?"

"Of course."

"That's how I like them," I confessed. "At least, men. Yes, women too, as a rule."

I got her a ticket.

"Is Klaus with you for long?" she asked, as we approached the lift.

"For as long as he'll stay," I told her. "He's restless."

The lift went down without her.

"Was he in the war?" she asked.

"Oh no, too young."

"But he looks somehow as if he had been."

"He's had a bad time," I said.

There was something more that she wanted to ask me, but people were pouring into the other lift and she only said: "Poor darling!"

"Well, good-bye!"

"Good-bye, Uncle!"

When I got back Peggy was in the telephone cupboard. As I passed the door I heard her say impatiently: "But you can't marry both of them. . . . No, I'm busy. . . . You can come to tea on Sunday. . . . Well, in that case you'd better toss up."

I hung up my coat and went back to the drawing-room. Klaus was still there, alone. He did not hear me when I entered. He was standing by the window with his back to the room, looking out

into the fog that almost hid the poplars at the end of the garden. His hands were in his trouser-pockets, a sturdy, English attitude. I went and stood beside him, but he did not seem to see me. His mouth was tight shut, in an expression of resolution quite different from any I had seen before. The muscles of his face were tightened, and, to my astonishment, his eyes were blazing.

Twice that night Peggy woke me. The second time she was certain she had heard someone going down the stairs. I got up and went to the door of Klaus's room. With my ear at the keyhole I heard him gently snoring.

"It's all right," I said, getting back into bed.

"You don't think you could lock his door? I'd be much happier."

"I can't," I said. "If he felt he was a prisoner he'd get away somehow. He'd probably try the window and break his neck. Besides, I want him to feel he's free."

"But if he did run away—imagine him all alone in London."

"We must risk it," I said. "The front door's difficult to open when you don't know the trick of it."

She turned over, and I thought she had gone to sleep again, while I, more nervous than ever, lay awake with my free ear straining for the slightest sound. But presently she spoke again, in a thin, choking voice.

"Whose fault was it, theirs or ours?"

I was sleepy. I did not know what to reply.

"Generally, theirs—I think. Particularly mine. But it's not beyond——"

She broke in: "I didn't mean that. It wasn't. You couldn't help it. You didn't know——"

She was crying now, silently, but I could feel the bed shaking.

I said, clumsily: "We can put it right. It's not worth—it's no good—thinking about—what made him like this. I've done it till I'm played out." (She said, in little gasps, "I know you have—it's I who—I didn't realize till I saw him what you—") "But we can build him up. We can build his body up, and his mind—well, I don't see it's impossible. I feel that if you're with him, if someone will——"

"His face," she whispered, "I've never——"

The clocks were all striking, and I counted four strokes from the grandfather in the hall.

"You must go to sleep. You'll be a wreck in the morning."

She whispered: "Yes."

But I knew that in the morning, if her eyes were tired, her face would be as I had seen it against the firelight, beautiful, with its Hellenic strength. Her body, resting against mine, was limp and pliant. But one hand held my arm, and the slender fingers gripped me tightly. I felt, running into me, exalting me, her mysterious strength. I knew that I had been right to bring Klaus to her.

If I could keep him. But she would keep him. "You know, John," Lanair had once said to me, "I'd be terrified if she was my wife. I'd feel like a little unarmed dwarf set to guard a gorgeous cathedral. I'd feel that anything I did might spoil it, and I'd feel that the cathedral was looking at me from above, when I couldn't see further up than the archivolt. I'd feel small and silly and dirty-handed." Klaus would feel like that. He might run away, but I believed that she would draw him back to her.

She was asleep now, breathing silently, yielded to sleep; but her fingers still held me. I loosed them carefully, slipped out of bed and crept to Klaus's door again. Peeping inside, I could just see the outline of his form on the bed. I stole back, and into bed once more. The house was still deadly quiet, but for the chatter of the clocks downstairs. Peggy's arm stretched out and curled round my neck.

XIII

"He's all right, then?" I asked Bennet on the telephone.

"Fine."

"And really useful?"

"Yes, really. More useful every day. It's astonishing how quickly he gets the hang of things. I don't think he'd ever seen a car made after 1910 when he came to me."

"What about my Vauxhall?"

"Is that post 1910?"

"You're wasting your employer's time," I said. "Go and get on with it."

He said: "Aye, aye, captain! Oh, when are you coming over?"

I thought for a moment.

"I can manage it this afternoon if that will be all right for Mollie."

"It will be. What time?"

"About half-past four?"

"That's fine."

He rang off.

That would give me time for a haircut; Peggy had said that I should go dinnerless if I came home unshorn.

Ten minutes after I had meant to slip away Destalow, seated comfortably on my desk, was still talking. "I'm regarding it from the point of view of precedent," he said once again. "By itself, the present issue is unimportant. If necessary, we could refer the papers back to Mordaunt, establish means of renewal, drop a hint to Sir Conway—I don't know though. One has to consider it from all points of view. . . ." So far I suffered him, for he was technically my senior. But my hair did need cutting, and Mollie, upon Hugo's word, would be laying in sugar-coated pastries. "I've promised to be with Shorter at half-past," I said, looking at my watch, and unobtrusively rang the bell. A double ring—Miss Gay understood that. She came in with so large a bundle of letters and with an air so ferociously business-like that Destalow had no option but to go. Rather sorry for Destalow, since he was getting on, and boring me was one of his few pleasures, I put on my things and walked briskly to Stile Lane.

The shop, to my disgust, was full. Did no one in London work after luncheon in these days, I wondered. I sat down behind Barnup's chair, hoping that he would contrive to give me a little precedence, and took up a paper that I found beside me. There might be further news of the Sianfu Kai-feng affair, hidden among the chorus girls and the footballers. No, this newspaper was not interested in Chinese politics, but in Chinese acrobats. The Kwei-lin Troupe had arrived in London, duly passported, and were to perform not only in the ordinary programme at one of the music halls but actually at an entertainment which Lady F—— had organized in aid of disabled soldiers. And why not English acrobats? my paper asked. Why had Chinese actors been permitted to enter the country? Was the Minister of Labour aware that these persons had entered the country not as tourists but as workers, not to spend money but to take it away? Were there no English jugglers? Were our pockets so bulging that we could afford to pay high wages to foreign performers? Did Lady F—— realize that in giving their services gratuitously on one evening they were throwing a sop to Cerberus, in order that they might take British bread out of British mouths on a score of other evenings? The writer of the first leader on the page opposite took the same view as I judged to be that of the news-editor. "We say finally," he wrote, "that a Government which permits British artists to be shouldered out of their jobs by inferior performers from countries outside the Empire is as dangerous an enemy to the country it is elected to rule as the rabble that now holds power in Moscow. The British Nation will not for one moment tolerate this last insult."

I put the paper down and glanced at Barnup, who was operating the clippers with fine artistry upon the meagre back hairs of his patient. In a minute or two he would offer "Shampoo, sir?" and if the old gentleman accepted, my chances of getting done before the imminent revolution were small; indeed, it would be touch and go whether I reached Pasture Green by four-thirty. Remotely wondering which British troupe was more skilful than the Kwei-lin brothers, who—it so happened—had astonished me by their virtuosity a few weeks before in Paris, I began listening to the occupant of the chair; who, with chin pressed down on his chest, was yet addressing his operator continuously, thoughtfully, in harmonious periods.

"You, in your position, hear a great many men talking," he said. "Every one of them with a new theory. I expect you hear, nowadays, about having 'an international mind' and being 'a good European.' That's a phrase I heard the other day myself. Now I'm sixty-eight. Yes, I'm not ashamed of it. I've lived a great deal longer than you,

longer than most of the men who sit in this chair." He jerked his head round suddenly, and it was only by a lightning movement that Barnup saved him from a gash in the neck. "And I tell you it's nonsense. I've been all over the world, Canada, Melbourne, Cape Town. And I tell you that there's no peace and no security when the British flag isn't riding in the breeze. I'm not a bigot, mind you. I state that as the simple, sober truth. England doesn't want to dominate the rest of the world, but she must, she's the only nation that can. (No, no grease.) 'These young people who are growing up now don't realize what a magnificent thing it is to be an Englishman. If they only knew what the Union Jack means to some of those folk out yonder! We've an opportunity before us now that we've never had before. Are we going to throw it at the feet of every Tom, Dick and Harry who's jealous of us? People may laugh at me, they may call me old-fashioned, but when I raise my glass to King George I'm proud of it, proud of it."

I caught Barnup's eye, and as swiftly as he decently could he parted the patient's hair, gave his face a wipe over, and whipped off the counterpane, revealing a short, thin, rather delicate-looking clergyman. The old man was still exhorting while Barnup pummelled his back with a hard brush and jerked him into his overcoat. He took his bill rather as a prima donna might take her fee if it were pressed into her hand on the platform, but went away quietly. I looked from the corner of my eye at my next neighbour, who had arrived before me and was deep in the *Sporting and Dramatic*. A young Cambridge man, by his tie, and from his face a fox-hunter. I slipped unobtrusively into the empty chair, and Barnup robed me.

"Do you know who that was?" I asked.

"The old parson, sir? Yes, that was the Reverend Hailey Mortimer. A very rich old gent, very keen on birds, I'm told. No, sir, not those sort of birds. The usual, sir, fairly short behind?"

"His views are very interesting," I prompted.

"Oh yes, sir, most interesting. He's one of the most interesting gentlemen I cut. Never at a loss for a word, always knows where he is, what's going on, who's right and who's wrong. I learn a lot from him."

His admiration was genuine, I think. He had the proper professional equipment, could give you a decent both-ways chance for any important meeting, or the constitution of the Spurs team next Saturday if you required it. But he liked to imbibe rather than impart information, and he preferred serious subjects. I have seen him so engrossed by the dissertations of a botanist from King's College that he almost forgot to wipe the rest of the soap off his neck.

"And very consistent, sir," he added. "I've never known him say the opposite between one cut and another a year later. That's not like some gentlemen, who'll be Wesleyans one day and Non-conformists the very next time I shave them."

"And you agree with his views?" I asked.

I was treading on rather delicate ground, for a barber does not as a rule care to admit his ego; but Barnup and I had almost grown up together.

"I wouldn't make bold to say that I rightly understand all he says," he replied. "But I think we see eye to eye as far as I follow his meaning. I don't see that we're going to be better off with navvies and such like in parliament."

"But on the international question?"

"Well, that's part of it, if you see what I mean. And I must say, there's a lot in what he says. I mean, sir—" he stood back suddenly, comb and scissors in the air, in order to launch himself into rhetoric—"we won the war, didn't we?"

I agreed with that proposition, but his tide of speech was dammed for a moment. He was a little nervous. We talked as a rule upon less momentous topics; and with his deep knowledge of character he realized that a sober grey tie might disguise a reckless anarchist, a wily papist, or a secret hankerer after decimal coinage. I heard the occupant of the chair on my left say: "And what about the Belgian massacres? Who's been hung for that?"

"The way I look at it," he continued cautiously, "speaking just for myself, is that if we don't get the better of it now that we have won, well, it doesn't look to anyone else in the next war as if it's the right man who counts. I mean, they started it, didn't they, sir? And everyone knows that one Englishman's worth three of anybody else. I don't mean that we should be stuck-up. But I do hold that we ought not to have all this unemployment, and if they don't pay what they owe, which was all settled in a treaty signed by both sides, with bishops and everything, then whatever happens we've got to make them. Not that I'm prejudiced one way or the other. About that, or women's votes, or anything else. But what's right's right, and to my way of thinking you can't argue about it, whichever point of view you take. Is that short enough in front, sir?"

My neighbour on the right had not, it appeared, the same breadth of mind. "People may call me old-fashioned," he was saying, "but that's no argument, is it?" He was a rustic-looking person with a city accent; in appearance, a tomato thrown carelessly upon a snow-heap. The man who was preening the alternate hairs of his sandy

moustache agreed that it was no argument. ("I've a great respect for what's old-fashioned," he admitted.) "And I say it's a scandal," my neighbour proceeded, "and I think it's damned public-spirited of those chaps to call attention to it. Who wants to look at a lot of blasted yellow jugglers, when we can't find work enough for our own people? Look at the conditions in the steel trade! If you're an Englishman you can go hang. No one cares what happens to you. But any nigger or dago or Eskimo or anyone else who cares to come along can help himself to just what he likes. Why, I heard the other day that they were admitting Germans now. I suppose soon we'll be hearing German accents in every restaurant and theatre we go into. I know one thing. The first time I meet a Boche in any public place I shall spit on the floor and walk out. And I'll let the proprietor know why I'm going. What the hell did we win the war for? That's what I say."

"Nothing on the hair, sir?" Barnup asked.

"Nothing on," I told him, wondering whether he would scream or fall into a faint were I one day to give a different answer.

With a few deft touches he finished and loosed me. Standing while he brushed my coat I looked down the line of patients, most of them resolutely talking through lather and cascade; at the line of attendants behind them, dexterous, dignified and silent. The Cambridge youth, more alert this time, had already pounced into my chair, and his place on the penitents' bench had been taken by Lothley Stuart, who peered over his spectacles and nodded to me. He whispered, leaning forward: "What a rabble—these days!" Barnup brought my bill. "All well at home?" I asked him, and he said, "Very well, thank you, sir." Before Stuart could buttonhole me for a talk on his perennial topic, 'the *reductio ad vacuum* methods of contemporary juvenile education,' I made for the open.

XIV

REACHING the studio, Elaine dropped on the bed-settee and lay there, full length, face down, eyes closed; tired out, and her head aching. She would lie still for a few minutes, and if her head got no better she would ring up and ask him to come another day.

Alicia was away at Cheltenham, attending a conference of the Women's Forward Movement. Alicia, just at this moment, would have been a help. Normally she was anything but a soothing person; scatter-brained, untidy, given to a certain loudness in dress, voice and manner, uncertain in her arrangements, always ready to postpone domestic jobs; constantly and most inconveniently organizing shapeless parties out of the nondescript persons who were caught in the whirlpool of her activities and who stayed on, leaning against each other or sprawling over the uncomfortable chairs, until one o'clock in the morning, in the desperate hope that when Alicia had said there was "nothing to eat anywhere" she was only joking. Her comings and goings, her conversation, her love-affairs, were strident and flaming. Even when she slept she snored. But she was a kind creature, and she could force herself into unnatural gentleness when Elaine was out of sorts. She would have made Elaine comfortable now, would have taken off her high-heeled shoes and put on bedroom slippers, have quietly laid the table and done her best to make a decent little luncheon, working behind the closed door of the minute kitchenette. As it was, one must cook something, or send out for a meal that would be charged extortionately, or make oneself tidy and go round to the Noah's Ark Café in Hudson Street; or go without.

Go without, Elaine thought. But in spite of her headache she was hungry.

It was not Benozzo's fault this time. This morning, he had been gentleness itself, friendly and rather sentimental, lapsing into his native tongue, pouring forth memories of beautiful women and sweet children in the sunny streets of Milano and Ravenna. He had been patient, had taken trouble with her, seizing odd pieces of newspaper and demonstrating on the margins instead of marking her own paper with his green chalk. The smell of his breath had amply shown the reason for his mood, but she had enjoyed his sunshine, had been troubled by her inability to do anything that would really please him.

Once, looking up sharply at his little dark eyes, she had caught a glint of amusement, had detected gentle sarcasm in his mouth, making her wonder. His ravings and imprecations no longer disturbed her; she recognized them as the methods of a thorough but clumsy teacher. His kindly criticism, the pity in his smile, were frightening. She had asked this morning: "I am improving, Benny, just a little? I am just a little better than when I came to you?" And his answer "You improve, yes, you improve all the time, you become more serious," had not satisfied her. He would never say more, she knew that. His aesthetic morality was such that he would not praise a pupil, except with "Ah! that shows a little feeling for design!" But there was something in his conscientiousness—the fact that she, who paid her fees regularly, never found him out or incapably drunk—something in his boredom, in the promptitude with which he closed the lessons, that made her suspicious. Would he have treated a really promising pupil in the same way? Did he refer to her when talking to the others, as he would say, leaning against her easel and picking his teeth: "That French boy, Didier, he has the artist in his fingers. He has brains. See this that he has done!" Perhaps Benozzo, after all, was not infallible. And perhaps she would develop late. That, at least, was worth hoping for. She would not give up the struggle, not yet. But she was nineteen now. If another year went by, and she had still done nothing which a conscientious critic could praise, there was nothing to live for. The idea of a life, stretching out, perhaps, for another forty or fifty years, in which one was not an artist, in which one got up and ate meals and went to bed, in which one did sweetly pretty drawings in Indian ink which were attached to calendars and sold for outrageous prices at Church bazaars—that vision stood against her mind's view like a desert unbounded, like damnation lasting to eternity.

But she was hungry. It was insane to give oneself a headache by wallowing in pessimism. It might be imaginary, Benozzo's indifference might be due to prejudice against her decent clothes and gentle accent; an aspirin, perhaps, was all that was needful.

Raising her head she found, with disgust, that she had been dribbling. There was quite a pool on the cushion. She turned the cushion over, got up, straightened her dress and went to see what she had in the larder.

Two aspirins made her feel better. Probably she would be fit to give Klaus tea. It would be a shame to disappoint him. But would he be disappointed? He expressed so little emotion, his feelings were so well guarded by his queer, studied manners. Better, anyway, to have company, instead of brooding—she would not be

able to work in this mood. There were, on the shelves, the remains of a pork pie, two slices of tongue, two eggs, a few sardines in a saucer, three pink pastries and one éclair on a plate, a few chocolate biscuits, and enough smaller oddments to make up a Danish course of *hors d'œuvre*. Most of it belonged to the days preceding Alicia's departure. Too weary, still, to cook the eggs, she carried the pork pie to the table, slipped an afternoon tea-cloth under it, added a cup and saucer, and put a kettle on the gas-ring for coffee.

Luncheon over, she lay down again. The aspirins were pulling their weight and a little peacefulness would enable them to finish the good work. She tried, as recommended on the aspirin-bottle, to make her mind a blank, and immediately the problem presented itself again. Should she get someone else to meet Klaus? Who was there? It had to be someone very tactful, who would keep off politics and anything that might drift into politics. At the same time not too frowsy or stupid, since exclusively feminine conversation got on any man's nerves. Men? There were Alicia's friends, but Alicia might be piqued if she invited one of them—Alicia was rather possessive about her friends—and in any case it was hard to know which among the current ones would not be surprised at such an invitation. Her own men friends—who was there? She had met the virtuose Didier once, and had been bowled over by his erudite conversation. She had danced with dozens of youths, many had been nice to her. . . . No, there was no one she would really like to ask. Olive Heath? Too noisy, she would frighten Klaus. Geraldine Watson? Too mouselike, Klaus would frighten her. It would be difficult, over the telephone, to explain to anyone that she was invited to meet a German boy who was not entirely sane and had queer, decisive, not wholly adult views on all kinds of topics. Yet could she manage him alone? They had had two walks together, but on a walk when conversation lapsed one could just go on walking. She could play the gramophone to him. Did he like Beethoven? She could not remember, and it was the only decent stuff she had, except for two double-sided Rimsky-Korsakovs, one of which was slightly scratched. She had not realized that all this would be so difficult. For days she had thought, with a certain pleasure, about the coming event. Now that it was so near it was black with difficulty. But her head was getting better every minute, and soon she would be able to think more clearly. She fell asleep.

When she woke, the fire had sunk to a hollow of blackening embers. She jumped up, stirred it, threw on some pieces of kindling that were left in the scuttle and built a little pyramid of small coal on top. Holding a sheet of the *Morning Post* across the grate, she

looked up at the clock on the mantelpiece and saw, horrified, that it was twenty-to-four. The remains of lunch were still on the table, and among them, in two fancy cartons, were the cakes she had ordered. Leaving the paper in position, held by the chimney cowl, she sprang at the table, whipped the china on to a drawing-board, pushed open the door of the kitchenette with her knees and dumped the china in the sink. The fire, as soon as her back was turned, raised a long, thin tongue of flame which caught the wood, leant outwards, and licked the first paragraph of an inverted leading article. As if mere words were not enough to scorch the Radicals, the paper blazed. Elaine, dropping the tablecloth which she had gathered by the four corners, grabbed it, but too late. She let go, and in flaming indignation it soared up the chimney. The provoking tongue, content with its handiwork, subsided.

The fire must be left. The room was more important. She ran round, pushing, straightening, collecting, bestowing. Her outdoor clothes, still lying on the back of a chair, were whisked behind the curtain that served as wardrobe. Rough sketches, brushes, and etching tools into the glory-cupboard, shoes under the draped window seat. Since Alicia's departure the room had become steadily tidier. Now, after a ten minutes' furious adjustment, it was sufficiently well-ordered to pass masculine criticism. There were traces still, of Alicia; frayed piping on the chairs, crumpled cushion-covers, scratches on the mantelpiece and holes burnt in the carpet. The tidiness was superficial; it is not easy for two young women to eat, sleep, live, paint and entertain in one large room; on every side curtains leant forward with the bulk of unseemly miscellanea pressing against them, and the higher shelves, the tops of pictures and lampshades, were not free from dust; but it would do. The fire again. Another sheet of the newspaper, torn and folded skilfully into cones, half a tallow candle from the top shelf in the kitchenette, left by a previous tenant, a few bacon-rinds. It went. Now, the kettle, gas-ring for safety.

By four tea was ready. Muffins, unearthed from the bottom of the sketching-satchel, on a brass tripod in the grate. The kettle wheezing on the trivet. A round, short-legged table in the middle of the hearthrug with cakes, silver teapot, Spode, one cup odd, apostle teaspoons. Two armchairs drawn up. A final glance, a last fiddle, and she ran to the wardrobe, pulling jersey over ears as she ran. The hyacinth, she thought. It was out of date, but it went perfectly with the room.

She was far from satisfied. The studio showed, somehow, that it had been pulled together at the last moment, and her own appearance would be the same; no amount of cold water, supplemented by a cup-

ful of hot from the kettle, could disguise entirely the fact that she had been asleep most of the afternoon. Yes, the room looked gloomy. Half-changed, powder-puff in hand, she went to the window. No sign yet. It was too early, really, to draw the curtains, but it would make the place more cosy. "I'm sure he likes cosy rooms," she thought. "I wish everything hadn't got so shabby." She switched on all the lights, then turned out the two middle ones, leaving only the hearth lights and the two in the gallery. "What a fuss, after all!" she thought, and brought the mirror to the mantelpiece where she could get some light on it. She chose the grey shoes, which were high enough at the back to conceal an incipient hole. She was glad, in a way, that she had not had time to invite a third.

The bus stopped at the end of Leighton Street, and two passengers, alighting, turned left and walked briskly eastward. Where the street opened into Poulteney Square Lady Saggard stopped.

"Well, you can find your way from here," she said. "You can see the house, it's by the fourth—no, the fifth—tree. The rather new-looking one."

"But you are coming too?" Klaus asked.

"I should like to, but I promised to be with Mrs. Allenthorp at half-past four."

"You did not tell me," he protested.

"But Elaine didn't invite me. I only came to show you the way. I thought you might get muddled with the buses."

He hesitated.

"All right!" he said, and shook her hand.

Turning at the corner, she saw him still standing, looking after her. She waved to him to go on.

He walked on slowly, taking in the square, with his head swinging slowly from left to right, from right to left. It was a strangely quiet place, so near to the roaring street where the buses went. A taxi flew past, but almost silently on the glass-smooth roadway. Sedate nurses pushed perambulators along the pavement, and within the railings, appearing and disappearing between the laurels and rhododendrons, little boys played cross-touch and broken-bottles. The houses were all alike, except for the varying colour of the stone, and each had its imposing porch, a few square feet of roof supported upon gigantic pillars. Tall houses, grave, like the houses in the Wilhelmstrasse, but not so austere, not so regimental. The light was going, already it was colder, and the nursemaids seemed to be quickening their steps. The light mist, which in London seemed always to

come as warning of a cold night, was gathering about the roofs and tree-tops, and a wetness, rain unformed, hung in the air beneath it. In all the windows blinds were being pulled down, curtains drawn, and light began to show behind the curtains, faintly, against the dwindling daylight. In the square there was no London smell, but a compound of mist and coal smoke and the faint fragrance of urban trees that is vouchsafed to the most faithful Londoners. The noises of the street, two hundred yards away, came very faintly. It would be nice, perhaps, to live behind some of those curtains. But to men and women walking on the pavement the square was a lonely place, the houses too proud or too shy to offer friendship. It was less lonely in the street where the buses went.

At Number Seventeen, as if he had been wound up and set to move a certain distance, Klaus stopped. Slowly, but with no outward sign of nervousness, he went up the steps and rang the bell. The door was open. After a long interval a man in shirt-sleeves answered.

"Yes?"

"Gotthold!"

"No one of that name here, sir."

"I seek a lady."

It was on the tip of the man's tongue to say that this was not a brothel, but he checked himself.

"Miss Lewis?" he suggested.

"No."

"Voos ate francy?" the man inquired.

"Please?"

"Or would it be Miss Chelcote, who lives with Miss Lewis?"

"Miss Chelcote, yes."

"Then you go up, and it's the second floor, on the right. Second floor, you understand?"

Klaus was beginning to understand the jingle of consonant and vowel that in England passed for speech. He went up the lino'd stairs, and, turning right, found himself in a dark entrance-lobby. On his right hand he found a door handle. He knocked twice, waited a little, cautiously opened the door and stepped into the coal cupboard. Groping again, he found another door, knocked, and Elaine's voice called "Come in!" He opened it a little way and peered round it.

The room was the most beautiful he had ever seen; long, high, with a little gallery running from end to end. A room made almost entirely of soft materials; the wall on the right a stretch of velvet curtains, which, covering the three tall windows, hung down to the upholstered window-seat; velvet curtains across the doors, a deep carpet covering the floor, the round table in the centre draped with

blue damask. Everything was blue, a rich dark blue offset by smoke-grey. The walls were grey, with a narrow blue frieze. There were two grey ornaments, figures of gazelles preposterously curved and lengthened, upon the mantel-shelf. From lamps shaded with faintly tinted glass the light fell upon a Turkey hearthrug, grey, with mysterious blue patterns, upon delicate china. The fire, heaped high and blazing, threw a tint of rose across the paler light, broke the evenness of its circumference, brought the grave picture to life. Elaine, in her light blue dress, stood in the half shadow of the alcove where her bed was, left there by the artist to be discovered upon a second scrutiny.

She said, as he stood by the table, looking about him: "Well, what do you think of my room, Klaus?"

"Your room?" he said, as if doubting that it could be hers.

"Yes."

"It is perfect. It is the most perfect room I have ever seen."

She said, coming forward into the light: "I'm glad you like it. There was a man here the other day, a painter, who said: 'It's just as vulgar as money can make it!' He asked us why we didn't go the whole hog and live at Claridge's. But I think it's pretty and cosy."

"It is perfect," he repeated.

She showed him the pictures, turning on the centre lights so that the blue of all the curtains rose into warm brilliance. The pictures were water-colours by Israel Henry (the humorous calendar belonging to Alicia had been hidden behind a uniform edition of the English poets), and Klaus, not caring for such faint colour and hazy outline, nodded at them silently.

"I think the gallery's rather sweet, don't you? Of course it's quite new, and it oughtn't to be there. The last owner but one had it put up, he was a commercial artist. He started making the room everything it ought not to be, and I've just gone on. Look, the kettle's boiling. You must be hungry. Which chair will you have?"

She put out the centre lights, and he watched her as she made the tea. Before, he had usually seen her in out-of-door clothes, tweed skirt and jersey, sometimes the sable coat above dark silk stockings; never in a dress.

"Would you like to start toasting the muffins? Or don't you think they're worth the trouble? I can cut some bread—say if you'd rather."

He toasted, while she arranged plate and knife beside him, and poured out the tea. Her velvet dress had wide sleeves caught close at the wrist. It was longer in skirt than the fashion, and the neck, cut in a modest circle, was decorated with a narrow, white frill

"Aunt Peggy fit and flourishing?" she asked.

"She is very well. I parted from her when we got out of the bus."

"Oh, she came up with you? Why didn't she come along?"

He was about to explain when his muffin dropped off the fork and fell among the glowing coals. Ineffectually he tried to lance it, and then, leaning forward, picked it out with his fingers.

"It's all right—there are heaps more—Klaus! You shouldn't have! Haven't you burnt yourself?"

He had replaced the muffin on the fork, sucked his fingers, and was wiping them with his clean handkerchief.

"A little only," he said. "I have been burnt more another time."

She asked, abruptly: "When?"

He answered, his brows wrinkled: "A house was on fire—I do not remember."

His eyes were still wandering about the room; returning, in a swift, shy glance, to her fair hair, which gleamed with the light upon it; sweeping down, when her eyelids were lowered, over her face and figure. She took the muffins as he finished them; scraped, unobtrusively, and buttered them.

"You must drink your tea," she said. "It's getting cold. No, we'll leave the last one. We can do it later if we want it."

His pocket handkerchief was spread over his knees to protect the new trousers. He was a little conscious of his smart clothes, which Lady Saggard had persuaded him to buy from a Hampstead tailor, rather stiff in them, infected with their dignity. It was a grey suit. His soft polo collar was bridged with a gold safety-pin, his tie was grey, his hair was brushed neatly. Of late he had learnt to shave more expertly, and with the double-treatment of sound diet and good shaving-soap his skin had altered perceptibly. An explorer's face, someone had said. His eyes, when they moved, moved slowly, fixed an object with deliberation. His fingers grasped little things more easily than they had done before.

"And how are you getting on with your work now?" she asked him.

He stopped eating when she asked him questions, and put the food back on his plate.

"I become more skilful," he said. "I am doing more difficult jobs now."

"You like it, don't you?"

"Please? I beg your pardon?"

"You like motors?"

"Yes. Very much."

He put the last crumb of a macaroon in his mouth and emptied his cup.

"Mr. Bennet is very kind to me," he said. "And Mrs. Bennet, too. Mr. Bennet has taught me a great deal. He is a very good engineer, he understands every kind of motor-car."

"But I should have thought you got tired of putting things right. I mean, it's not like making new cars—and always to be fiddling with little screws and things, and all the oil and mess——"

Unable to tolerate such obscurantism, he broke in upon her without even emptying his mouth.

"The mess and the oil you do not notice. It is healing, it is art. Hear me, please. The machine has a constitution, a combination of all the parts. They go together, the parts move in a proper way. When an engine is brought to me, I listen. There is something out of its duty, something does not do its work. I listen, and I make a theory. Before I can save myself I take my tools and make an exploration. I find it, a little thing broken. Then I must make it right. It is compulsory, perhaps, that other parts are taken away. I take away one part, I take away another, at last I am at the unfunctioning. Then I make the cure, and I can test perhaps with my little finger, when it is in its place and I cannot see it. My finger tells me that it is all right, it moves just like it was made to move. That is—you will help me, please?—an excitement, yes, a trill. It is like a singer who makes a note that he has tried to put in his voice. Then, then there is the backplacing, all the other parts into their earlier places. I make a trial as I place. It is a long work, perhaps, six, seven hours. If I make a mistake it is no good, but I cannot make a mistake when I have known all the working. Then at last it is done, and the oil in all the oil places, and I make a trial and I listen, and all the parts do their work as they were made. That is another—yes, trill. Then I am ready for a new work. It is—it is in the ears, and in the fingers that the trill comes. You understand?"

"It does sound thrilling like that," she said.

Nervous, but rather pleased with his eloquence, he seized a Louisiana shortcake from the plate she held out to him and began to eat it with concentration.

After a silence, she said rather mournfully: "I wish my work was like that."

He looked up at her, puzzled.

"But you are an artist," he said. "That is the best thing of everything, except an artist in music perhaps—but no, it is as good to

be an artist with the pencil. I am only a—a doctor. I can listen and see, I can say 'Good! Fine! Beautiful!' but I cannot make the beautiful. You——"

"But you achieve something," she argued.

"And you, but yes, surely. You achieve something better."

"I don't," she said. "I don't achieve anything, anything worth anything."

He listened, intent and sympathetic, while she talked.

"I think I do, sometimes. I sit up late, long after Alicia's gone to bed, to finish something. Next day I take an impression, and then touch the plate a little, and then take another impression, and at last I think it's quite perfect. I hide it away for a bit in case anyone should say anything nasty about it, and when I look at it again I don't feel that it's as good as I thought it was. Then like a fool I open a book that has reproductions of Whistler's work, and the next time I see my own etching it looks as if it had been done by an elephant with St. Vitus's dance. It's all the wrong shape, and too black in parts, and not black enough in others, and there's a sort of muddle in the background, and the sky's wrong, and it's not clear what it's meant to be. Do you know, sometimes I've really cried about it. One goes on and on, and one doesn't get any better. I know what I want to do, it's all in my head, but it just doesn't turn up."

He did not know quite what to say. It was astonishing to find a lady, so complete in herself, so quiet and sure and poised, in need of his pity.

"But it needs a long time," he said at last. "When you are old you will make perfect pictures. And now, they are so good that people buy them. They give you the money to live, yes?"

She shook her head.

"I've never even tried to sell them. I wouldn't like to sell what's not really any good. You see, I don't have to make a living—Daddy keeps me. I wish I did. When you've got your living to make it keeps you at it all the time, and you've no time to worry about being a failure as an artist. When you've earned your bread you feel you've done what's expected of you. Nothing's expected of me and, well——"

She made a gesture of hopelessness, emptiness.

"But you will marry one day," he said thoughtfully; and then, quickly changing round, "I should like to see some of your pictures. I have only seen some drawings that were not finished."

"Some time," she said. "I've nothing worth showing you at present."

Another line of approach suddenly occurred to him.

"At the Abbey," he said, "there was a Brother who was an artist. I watched him often when he worked. He could not make a picture of himself, he could only imitate the pictures of others. He had an old—what is it?—a book of the Mass, with—the turnings and twistings—the—thank you, yes, illuminations—decorations? Yes, thank you—and he made a copy. He made a measuring with a little measure-board, and made all the lines with his pencil, and then more lines, and then the colour, little bits, every day. All the time I was there he did one—two pages—a page and a little bit. But that was an artist. His work was so good that it was indifferent by the one made already. Oh, so patient. And his eyes became—not strong."

"He must have been wonderful to watch," she said. "Of course, there's a difference between——" But it was useless, she thought, to try to explain in simple terms the difference between art and craftsmanship. He would follow her with patient interrogation and at last reveal, perhaps (as he had done on a similar occasion), that he had studied the subject more closely than she. She asked, instead: "How long ago was it that you left the Abbey?"

"About a year," he answered promptly. Then, with more hesitation: "Perhaps a longer time. I cannot remember clearly."

"Did you like it there?"

"At the Abbey?"

"Yes."

"Not very much. It was not comfortable. They said I was English, and they locked me up, and then I—I was taken away, on the ship, to here, to England. That is why I am here. It is—rather confusing."

Elaine had been warned—"Don't, whatever you do, badger Klaus. Don't try and make him remember things. You see what I mean, dear? Doctor Henricault says that at present it would only induce obstinacy. Later on, perhaps——" But she could not resist the temptation—and she knew Klaus, she thought, better than half a dozen Henricaults.

"There's a thing you've never told me," she said abruptly. "How did you get your poor ear like that?"

He put his hand up to feel the damaged ear, and to her relief smiled. But for a moment he seemed to have no answer. Then: "It was a bullet," he said. "I think it came from a Maxim—I am not sure."

"But how——?"

As if inventing a story for her entertainment, he said slowly: "I was standing—by a window. The English soldiers were running

to the house, and I was shooting. I saw one of them who fell down. Then I felt pain in my ear. But I did not notice much."

"But was that in the war?"

He hesitated, reflecting.

"No. No, I think that it was after the war. We were all together, in a very big house, Gustav, and—Horstkötter—and—I do not remember—many others. Yes, there was Erich, I think. The war was over. But the English were still there. They wanted to get into the factory, but Gustav would not allow them."

"And what happened afterwards?"

"Afterwards?" His forehead wrinkled, his eyes began to rove, along the carpet, up the line of his sharp trouser-crease. "Afterwards there was a fire," he said doubtfully. "That was when my mother——"

Frightened, now, by a new look in his eyes, she said: "Your cup's empty, isn't it? Do let me give you some more. Another cake? Yes, do."

He passed his cup to her absently.

"But I killed one of the English soldiers," he said, with quiet triumph.

Elaine, as she filled his cup, felt her control inexplicably slackening. For no reason, a bubble had wedged itself in the back of her mouth. Returning the cup with a hand that shook slightly, she said in a stretched, husky voice: "But you don't feel like that now?"

He seemed to be surprised by the question.

"Please?"

It was an effort for her to repeat: "You don't—hate us like that, now? Surely you don't, Klaus!"

He answered, in a practical voice: "They hate us, we hate them. Always."

"But I don't," she said, warm now, a little angry with him. "And Uncle John and Aunt Peggy——"

"They pretend," he said dogmatically.

His hand went to his trouser pocket and he gave her a crumpled piece of paper.

"You will see—there."

It was a cutting from a newspaper—she knew which paper by the print. She read it and threw it in the fire.

"It's not true," she said. "That paper's written by dirty little bounders. It's owned by a bounder. I know him; my father helped him when he was down and out. You shouldn't read such nonsense."

"I find a great amount of such nonsense," he said stubbornly.

Not for months had Elaine felt so weak, so unable to command herself. Her instinct was to run out of the room, to find somewhere dark and to cry. But so far her lips, held close and trembling, had withstood the force that pressed behind them. Her eyelids, restlessly blinking, had so far controlled the flooding moisture. She bent low over the tea-things and nervously scraped the crumbs on her plate into a little pile.

Breaking the long silence, Klaus asked: "Do you own this room, or does it belong to your parents?"

He waited for her answer, and when none came he realized that something was amiss. She had burnt her mouth, perhaps, by drinking her tea too hot. "You are hurt?" he asked, and still she did not speak. It must be some emotion. Little as he knew of young girls from experience, his reading of poetry had taught him that they were *leicht aufgeregt*. But what could have so moved her? They had been talking of engineering, of pictures. Something else, what was it? He had said something unkind, but he could not remember what it was.

"I have been uncourteous," he said, in his quiet, dignified voice. "I make apology."

There was still some tea in her cup, quite cold. She drank it, and it released her voice.

"We'll change the subject," she said decisively.

He agreed: "Yes, please. Let us talk of other things. But I would make an apology. I would say that I am sorry. I said unkind things."

His contrition came near to breaking the control she had regained. But she smiled at him.

"You—don't—hate *me*?"

He was shocked. Where could she have got an idea so unnatural? She was such a quiet young girl, as a rule so self-possessed, so educated and able to take care of herself. She was tired, perhaps, after so much drawing. It was difficult to understand young girls who seemed to be so complete in themselves, who appeared so perfect in their speech, their dress, their manners.

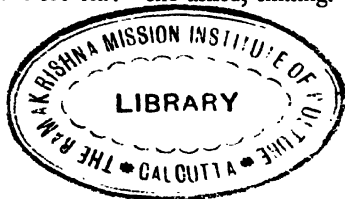
He could only say: "You have been very kind. You have given me good food, and all enjoyments."

"So you don't hate me?" she asked, not wholly satisfied.

He waved his hand, the gesture of one who dismisses a business proposition.

"It is impossible," he said.

"Then you'll have some more tea?" she asked, smiling. "Or a cigarette?"



Still puzzled, he accepted the cigarette, hunted out his own matches from an unlikely pocket, held a match for her and lit his own.

The diversion did not last long enough for Elaine to summon new conversation; her fund, as a rule inexhaustible, had given out in the emergency. "I'll just clear these things away," she said, gaining time. He helped her to pack the plates on the tray and carried it for her as far as the door of the kitchenette, where she took it from him. "You mustn't look inside," she said, "it's in an awful state." "I may assist to wash up, yes?" he asked, dutifully turning his back. "Oh no, I'll leave it till later." "But yes!" he insisted.

They washed up together, he with his coat off, she in the overall she used for her escapades in oil-painting. She was surprised to find him so capable, and while she talked about domestic adventures—how they had run right out of coffee on the evening when the great F. L. Stanmore came in, how she and Alicia had both thought they heard a burglar one night—he wiped the plates with meticulous care, piled them, and—unheard-of refinement—finished them off with a second and drier tea-cloth. He was watching her with new interest. It was a pity that she had put on the rather clumsy overall, which did not suit her slight figure; but the back of her neck was visible to him now, where her hair came to a point at the top of the shallow furrow, and with her quick movements, stretching, stooping, rubbing, all the lines of her form were altering at every second, so that she was a series of sketches, rapidly succeeding, instead of one painting in which one attitude dissolved slowly into another. She was easier to understand, in working garb and briskly moving. Her talk now, though it ran and danced so mercurially that it was hard to follow, made it easy to be kin with her, for it did not suggest depths and mysteries. She was homely, she was no more remote and unfathomable than Aunt Peggy. Yet, for the excitement of it, to see the outline of her body a little more clearly, Klaus waited with conscious impatience for the overall to come off.

When the work was finished he said peremptorily: "I must go now," but he was glad when she pressed him to stay longer, for the fire burnt splendidly, the room was all warm comfort, and he was no longer so frightened of her. With the shedding of the overall her elusiveness returned. He gazed, fascinated, at the blue dress, as she took her former seat by the fire, and when her eyes were turned he stared at her silk stockings, hardly able to believe that there were legs and knees, of skin and flesh like his own, beneath them. He almost moved back his chair, afraid to be so close to a creation so unearthly, afraid that something he might say would upset the poise of her being

as it had done before; almost wished again for the overall, which made relationship so easy.

But her voice, cool and gentle, reassured him. She said, nestling her shoulders between the cushions, suddenly releasing her running thoughts: "I wonder if you've ever had the feeling of being in a dream. I don't quite know what it is, but sometimes, as I walk along, I seem to be watching myself. Sometimes when I've been doing something, like washing-up just now, I'm not conscious of doing it and I'm surprised when I find it's done. Then I wonder if it's really me who's done it, and then I feel that it isn't me here at all, and the only real me is someone a long way back, sitting on a cushion in a big room with big windows and looking at a picture-book. You see, I knew that that was me. And I can't believe, sometimes, that it's the same person I see reflected in a shop-window, or that I hear saying something quite grown-up at a dance. Have you ever felt like that?"

Klaus considered. He had not been able to follow all her meaning, but he thought that he understood the substance of it. She was, then, not only an artist, but a metaphysician also. He was amazed by her mind's versatility and her eclecticism; astonished, most of all, by her sympathy. He could remember, vaguely and rather unwillingly, such a condition of the mind as she had described; he thought that he could recreate that condition, that it was near to him—now. He did not answer her, only stared with unfocussed eyes into the fire. He began to breathe heavily, scared by the pain of his mind in labour.

"But that's all foolishness," she added, afraid that she had blundered once again. "The name sensible people give it is 'wool-gathering.'"

"It is most interesting," he contradicted. "I have been acquainted with the phenomena you have mentioned—it is from Hegel, is it not?—but no, I have forgotten. It is a long time that I have not read my books, only books of poetry and engines. But I do not understand this—what word?—'woolcollect'? You must explain, please."

She put her hands over her eyes, wondering if it were possible.

"Well, the English, you know, are very plain and practical. Yes, practical, that means 'able to do things but not to think about anything.' So if there's anything they don't understand they fit a word on to it and put it away in a pigeon-hole."

"A pigeon-hole?"

"I mean, they call it something and don't worry any more about it. So if anybody's dreamy, like me sometimes; I mean if anybody wanders about without appearing to know what he's doing, they say he's 'woolgathering.'"

She stopped suddenly. It was a dangerous topic, she wished she had never started it.

"But—woolgathering?" he pursued.

"Yes. I don't know how the word came to be used. I don't know anything about wool. But I suppose you gather wool like this——"

Without moving from her chair she gave him a representation of woolgathering as she imagined it, her eyes staring blankly upwards, her mouth agape, her fingers loosely and fecklessly stirring the air. Klaus grinned, giggled, and laughed outright.

"Like this?" he said, rising in his eagerness, and with knees bent waded upon the hearthrug, copying her expression and gesture.

"Like that, yes! That's it exactly."

She laughed, he went through the performance again, and they laughed together.

"Like a mad person?" he suggested, still grabbing the air and gazing at the ceiling.

"No, only like an absent-minded person."

She was still laughing. He stopped short in his antics, the humour lingering on his mouth.

"There was a Brother at the Abbey," he said—"('Oh dear!' she thought, 'the Abbey again!')—"who gathered the wools. Like this——"

Standing up again, he stretched his face to a caricature of monastic piety, bent his shoulders, and advanced with toddling steps, his arms held rigid before him, his hands feverishly clutching. In his diabolical satire Elaine could see the monk, his lined, ascetic face, almost his hood and cowl. "You mustn't, Klaus," she cried, laughing, "I'm sure he was a good man. I shall get hiccoughs if I laugh like this." But she was delighted with his sudden frivolity, triumphant, as if she had made elaborate plans to peel off the tough rind of his German *ernst*. She could not have believed that he was able to laugh like that. "But you do it awfully well," she said. And he, sitting down again, relapsing into dignity but still faintly smiling, was pleased with his success.

The tide of laughter had swept away the last of their embarrassment, and they talked eagerly of trivialities, of customers who came to the garage, of Elaine's friends and her home in Sheffield, of the view from the road that led to the Spaniards, of Benozzo. When he lost his shyness and ceased to trouble about correct phraseology he could talk more rapidly; with concentration and some imagination she understood most of what he said. Her own speech, when she grew eager, danced and tumbled, but his attention was fixed on her now, and when

he could not understand he was content to watch her lips, the droll lines that appeared between her nose and the corners of her mouth, the gestures of her slender hands. He could not think of an afternoon which had been more enjoyable.

When, reluctantly, he rose to go, she put on her coat to go with him. "I must see you safely to the station," she said, and he was too grateful to be insulted. He turned his back while she powdered at the mirror, held the door open for her, bowing from the shoulders, and with a sudden uprush of possessiveness offered his arm for her safety on the stairs. As far as the bus-stop they talked. He must be nice to Aunt Peggy and Uncle John, she said (as if to her he would grant any favour), they were so kind; "and so fond of you," she added timidly. "They are good people," he agreed, but she did not know if he said it only to please her. In the bus they were silent. He gave her a penny for her fare and paid his own; gave his seat, rather self-consciously, to a woman, and stood tightly gripping the strap, with his eyes fixed on an advertisement. At Tottenham Court Road, when she had seen that he had the right ticket, they said good-bye.

When he had gone Elaine stood still, unconsciously obstructing the stream that flowed towards the lifts. She was confused; could not, for an instant, remember what she had to do next. A moment before, as guardian of a helpless foreigner, she had been sturdy and self-assured; with only herself to look after she had become limp and small. A woman steering two quarrelsome children through the crowd said something angry, a man with a suitcase swayed into her and curtly apologized. She began to move slowly. From a corner of her eye she saw a tall youth about to overtake her and thought that for some reason Klaus had come back. She turned quickly and smiled. The young man raised his hat, frowned and passed on. Ashamed, she pushed her way into the street and called a taxi, which in a series of sickening rolls took her home. "What a fool!" she thought, slowly mounting the stairs, "not to suggest having dinner somewhere and then a show."

The fire had taken advantage of her brief absence and had to be coaxed delicately into convalescence. When her coat was off she sat down in the chair where Klaus had been sitting, fished for a *Studio* that had been hidden beneath it and stared without attention at the reproduction of a still-life. The fire might come up, or it might be necessary to get sticks and paper. She was tired and rather chilly, her headache had returned. The meal problem arose again; she would have to go out for it, she thought; and then a cinema perhaps—she did not feel like working—or perhaps early bed. Yes, the fire was responding, there was a little flame now in the right-hand corner.

Acting on a sudden impulse she went to the telephone and rang up Church Row. "Is that you, Aunt Peggy? Yes, Elaine. I just wanted—I thought I'd just better tell you I saw Klaus off at the station, about ten minutes ago; a quarter of an hour, perhaps it was. I hope he'll be all right. Yes, I should think so. Perhaps you'd be a darling and just ring through when he gets back—I'm not sure if he understood about not getting on a Highgate train. Oh yes, I should think so. Thursday? May I? I should love to. Thank you awfully! Well, you'll let me have a ring. I say! are you there still? Tell Klaus to speak to me, will you please, there's something I meant to say to him." The fire was progressing wonderfully and it would be a shame to leave it; and there would be all the business of making oneself tidy. Perhaps the tongue would do, and cocoa was not much trouble. There was a blood-curdler by William le Queux somewhere which would last until she could decently go to bed—but the scuttle would want refilling. She turned on all the lights, to make herself more cheerful, and immediately turned them off again, preferring cosiness. It was lonely, without Alicia.

XV

WE came into the short days, when you shave unsatisfactorily by electric light, and the daylight ends before you begin your leisure, and you are only fully alive in the fireside evenings, protracted as far as possible towards the next day's gloom. Hardly anything was left in the garden. There was a song about, which had started from Miss Blanche's lips at Drury Lane, and it was propagated by eager errand-boys and gramophone companies through the eighty-five counties,

*The snowdrop's shooting up, up,
The snowdrop'll soon be through.
If the snowdrop drops, we'll all drop
With a kiss from me to you.*

to a travesty of one of Schubert's airs which, with an odd twist at the end of the second line, worked into your blood like a serum. It coloured life, in those weeks, and it filtered into the Spring. I hear it still, from sentimental sopranos and from diehard barrel-organs, and on each occasion I suffer for a few days from its infection, as white men long retired from the tropics still suffer from time to time a bout of remittent fever. Though it is apt to fall upon me on warm summer evenings, bellowed by a whole company in the "Songs of Yesterday" item of a seaside concert programme, it still makes me smell the London winter fog and feel the days when blue sky hardly shows from Sunday to Sunday. I suppose that our winters are no better, but I remember none that have lain so darkly and heavily upon me as that one; neither—let me own—do I find fires and baths so warm now, or so much gaiety in the streets crammed with Christmas shoppers.

There were fine days, none the-less, even if the sky was dull and the wind bitter. I can remember more than once walking with Klaus along the Heath road after church on Sundays, as far as the Spaniards and back. I think he enjoyed that walk. He would not come to church with us, or attend Mass either; the topic of religion was abhorrent to him, and it was hard to persuade him even to walk so near a church as through a graveyard; but he would be waiting for me in the hall when we got back, with his coat on ready. He liked,

I think, to scan the faces of the people we passed, respectable families in crocodile formation taking their exercise between Matins and luncheon, pretty girls in couples, youths swaggering in their best clothes, elderly men in the cycling-costume of the nineties who struggled to control the high spirits of yapping terriers. For us it was no lazy stroll, for we were out to warm our blood, and each to walk the other down if it were possible. Our rivalry was tacit, but I am certain it existed, and against the length of his legs I found the work none too easy. It was joy, after a week cramped between electric light and stifling, chilly radiators, to face the wind with coat-collar buttoned and with one's legs to drive up heat against it; at last to turn, and to go back, cheeks glowing, with the wind harmless and helping behind; or when it blew up from the north to suffer its sting on one cheek and then, as the Bible enjoins, to turn the other. It is a road I would rather walk on than any seacoast esplanade, for if you have not the sea on one side you have the heath stretching gloriously, and on the other, instead of the overweening monstrosity of palaces and pensions, the smoking, red-grey houses which fade behind each other until they reach the blurred dome of St. Paul's. "It is very—grand," Klaus said to me once, stopping for a moment to gaze over the city. "I would like to visit you," he said afterwards in one of his letters, "if only to walk again on the road at the top of the Heath." We did not talk much, and only on general subjects. Occasionally, when the smell of a cigar or an accident of rhythm pricked the skin of his memory, he would say something which gave me a glimpse of the country behind, which I still knew so little and wanted so much to understand. But I did not press him, only walked on with my face turned halfway towards him, hoping that he would say more, grieved when the incision had closed again. ("Not yet," Henricault reiterated, "don't bother him yet. Smith would tell you 'yes.' But I don't work on a shrinking mind, only on a patient one. I'll help you in time. Till then you can do more than I can—comfortable bed—meat extract—no badgering.") It was the same when I visited him at Pasture Green, where I went as often as I could manage. He greeted me warmly there, explained the job he was doing, seemed to find pleasure in my presence at the Bennets' table. But, though I sometimes stood beside him for an hour or more as he worked at the bench, he would say nothing except "The concert last night, it was beautiful, the melody is still in my head." I noticed that in the evening, when I was in the room, he would always have his chair some way back from the fire, and would be engrossed in his reading. Alone with Peggy he would bring his chair close to hers and talk, on neutral topics, wherever she cared to lead him.

She was more deft than I, better able by every fine adjustment of tone and gesture to touch and hold his sympathy. I was an onlooker, while she worked her curing magic upon him; I wondered at her Griseldian patience, and I loved the smile, the intimate, secret smile, that he kept only for her. But I was not so patient, and by no means happy.

He seemed to change so little, so slowly. Peggy told me that he changed every day, that he was always surprising her by gestures or actions which she would only have expected from an English boy. Less responsive to such subtle indications, I doubted if he would ever attain to wholeness, ever throw off the cloak of sleepiness and advance consciously and boldly into the lively status of manhood. That, perhaps, was the main reason for the slight melancholy which hardly left me at that time. But I was troubled, too, by the fear of me which still, on some days more than others, seemed to possess him.

Not a live fear. Not, I think, a fear flavoured by dislike (though at the time I sometimes believed so). It was revealed only by his taciturnity, his reluctance to speak or to let me speak of serious subjects; a glance he gave me sometimes when he thought I was not looking, with eyes that seemed to suspect me of masquerade. It was my own fault, perhaps. Somehow, by look or gesture, I betrayed my interest, I showed him that he was my patient as well as my guest. Again and again, ridiculously, we were suddenly shy of each other. I cursed my own shyness, was wounded by his. I could not wholly free my mind from the belief that he identified me with England; with the hostile, treacherous, bullying England which an odd seed had made to flower in his imagination, and which chance remarks of shoddy-minded men and women in restaurants and theatres, floating across to us to catch his ears, would foster and nourish. Once, in a railway-carriage in my presence, an elderly woman deliberately insulted him. He went pale with anger. We got out at the next station; but for the rest of the day he would hardly talk to me at all. His attitude was subtly changing; he no longer flaunted his foreign manners and accent, no longer put his hands in his pockets or lit a cigarette when the national anthem was played. At times, I believe, his most secret wish was to join and move with the lusty crowd that asked for little enough besides loyalty; yet, when his courage made him stand still, to be pushed and jostled by the cheerful stream, I could have embraced him for his magnificent loneliness.

I poured out my troubles to Lanair, towards the end of a long day we had together. He was taking his boat round from Shoebury-

ness, where he had landed her in awkward weather, to Burnham; and he had asked me to take a day off and go with him. I was engaged to meet Charles for luncheon on the day Lanair had chosen. Charles, having just returned from a jamboree of some ecclesiastical kind in Toronto, was agog to tell me how wide beyond imagination he had found the Empire, and as bait he had offered the additional company of Mabel and her husband, who were staying at the Rectory. But I was not yet ready to see him again, and accepting Lanair's invitation as a dreadful but convenient alternative I told Charles on the telephone that I was forced to visit a sick friend. Mabel, I knew, would enjoy teasing Charles just as much without me.

I was, perhaps, duly rewarded for my duplicity. It poured all day long, and the wind, which Lanair said with some irritation was "dung to sail in," blew as easily and coldly through my drenched clothes as a cone of ice through warm butter. Many times—as I sat huddled on the rearing gunwale, holding with icy fingers a line that Lanair had passed over to keep me happy, partially recovering from seasickness only to be more acutely conscious of surrounding danger—I thought of the good-natured little party devouring their rissoles in the Fleet Palace or whatever temple of gastronomy Charles had thought smart enough for the occasion. But if pleasure can be had vicariously, it was a good day, for Lanair, cursing the wind, cursing his yacht (which he loved as a man loves a terrier), cursing even the line of the English coast which refused to shape itself to the wind's vagaries, was as happy as an Isle of Wight man can be; and I, who knew nothing of the sport he loved, could yet admire the deft way in which, in the uncertain, gusty wind, he handled lines and tiller; could read, in his frowning lips, the strange pleasure which the horrid weather gave him. We were without proper food from ten in the morning, when we started, till we arrived at Burnham in the evening. We drank beer from bottles and tea from a thermos flask, and with numb, wet fingers we passed sodden sandwiches between each other when the skittishness of the boat allowed us. Our pouches we kept dry, but the tobacco (in my case at least) was damp before it was lighted, and it smoked mossily. Not until Lanair's tireless manoeuvres had at last, with darkness falling, got us into sheltered water, did the blood start to run in my limbs again and my physical misery to abate.

The wind dropped altogether then, and we drifted on the tide, which mercifully had just turned to go in. Lanair, sensing the phenomenon before it happened, uttered one blood-curdling oath and threw his lines on to the floorboards.

"We shall be here till morning," he said, and took out his pipe again.

Hungry as I was, I could have waited as long as that, enjoying the blessedness of freedom from the wind's rough handling.

"We might get a tow," I suggested, but he did not answer.

There was still a cupful of tea left, decently hot. Lanair refused his share, I drank it off, and with that encouragement my heart worked bravely, so that my arms and legs began to be warm, and at last my hands and feet recovered. We consumed a last packet of sandwiches, which Lanair had kept against this emergency, and I found a piece of chocolate which seemed to go charmingly with cheese and Gentlemen's Relish. The rain had slackened, it was not so cold, and by comparison with the icy avalanche which had descended on us all day long I felt it as if it were a tepid shower in a club bathroom. Lanair, his cap pulled down over his eyes, his head refuged in the huge collar of his trench-coat, his teeth grimly clutching an inverted pipe, looked glum enough. Yet in his eye I detected a sparkle of triumph. He had got her in, with a headwind all the way round, and be damned the weather.

"As like as not," he said thoughtfully, "we'll be rammed and capsized by one of those gutterblusting petrol-steamers. There's a lot about, these days. You know the things. Inhabited by sporting gentlemen. You could stick an arc-lamp on the top of your mast and then they'd go slap into you amidships, doing their steady twenty knots or whatever it is, and come out the other side. They wouldn't worry 'emselfes. They'd apologize politely as they went snorting off, 'So sorry, thought you were the North Foreland lighthouse, and we'll send the A.A. man along when we meet him.' The sort of gentry that read the *Financial Times* and think that cubbin' 's amusin'."

"However," I said, "I'd rather be drowned in this nice smooth water——"

We felt a light breath on our cheeks, and the mainsail fluttered. But it died away to nothing.

"I remember," Lanair said, "one night when I was working on a sloop, running between Dedeagach and Lemnos, a rather odd thing happened. There was no moon, the wind was on the port beam and rather lazy, we had been on the look out. . . ."

The water, the colour of smoked glass in the last daylight, opaque, lay as flat as stretched silk on every side except seawards; where the dribble of waves broken farther out, tumbling again with the remnant of their motion, gently ruffled it. There, a line of faint opalescence

marked the border of the sea's territory. On the starboard side I could dimly see the shore, only a hundred yards distant, perhaps, but it might, for all my eyes could judge, have been high cliffs a dozen miles away. The silence, with Lanair's low voice hiding every sound but the distant frush of the sea's waning temper, increased our solitude. In that odd state of tired, inert discomfort, clothes sticking against my skin, my brain restful in reaction to the drubbing of the wind in my ears, I was not ashamed of my secret frailties.

"Lanair," I said slowly, "I've been wanting to ask what you think——"

He stopped talking, leant over and tapped his pipe against the side of the boat, causing a little hiss as the smouldering ashes fell into the water. He moved closer to me, so that I could just see his face, light, under his dark cap; the black of his moustache and, faintly, the light of his eyes.

"About Klaus?" he asked.

"Yes."

By the movement of his shoulders I could see that he was getting out his pouch and filling his pipe again.

"I think he's going all right."

"Everyone says that," I answered. "Perhaps it's only a private trouble. He doesn't like me."

He considered that statement for a while in silence.

"What makes you think that?" he asked.

I shrugged my shoulders.

"I don't know. Something in his face. What he doesn't say. Sometimes what he does. What d'you call it?—intuition."

"You're rather a silly old person," he said gently. "You look for trouble. You expect too much. You want him to break out of his unnatural shell like a butterfly out of a chrysalis. It doesn't happen, you know. You don't know just what sort of bloody things were happening to that boy while you were waiting for him, but you can guess, surely, from what he was like. At least, I can. Of course I happen to know more about what was going on over there than what you see in the damned English newspapers. So it didn't need much effort on my part to guess. I'm not trying to be nice to you when I say that you and Peggy've worked a bit of a miracle. It's not much more than a few weeks, after all."

"Peggy's done wonders," I admitted. "His appearance alone—But what's putting me off my food is that he seems to have got to a point where he's stuck. I feel that you—you can change some things, the rest are—well, permanent, built in."

"What things?" he asked.

"Well—his antipathy to me, for instance. I've been quite decent to him——"

"Too obviously decent, probably. But there's no reason why that should be permanent; whatever on earth makes you think it should be?"

"Well, putting it bluntly, I made him a bastard and I killed the man he thought was his father——"

"Too bluntly. Put as bluntly as that both statements are quite untrue. When a man says he's only telling you the unvarnished facts he's nearly always lying. Even so, Klaus doesn't know——"

"Sometimes I think he does——"

"That's rubbish," he said quietly. "I forget what the psychologists call it, 'projected inhibition' or something. You were in the war too long, you work in stale air more than's good for you. If Klaus knew, he wouldn't be living with you."

"But he might—in some remote way—faintly suspect, and not be quite sure."

With tremendous earnestness, he said: "I tell you honestly, John, if that's all you're worrying about you might as well not. That sounds brutal, but I know I'm right. There are eighty different possible reasons for his shyness—which is all it is. In the main, it's like a girl's shyness. A girl will talk to you like another man as long as she feels quite certain you're not in the least interested in her sexually, but directly you're just a bit more than kind or courteous, if you give her a birthday present, or write her a postcard when it isn't her birthday, she shrinks into her shell and watches you as if you were a noted ravisher. It's like that with Klaus. He can't think why the hell you take all that trouble." He paused, "What else is there?"

I said: "His attitude to—various things. Religion's one."

"What attitude?"

"Bunks from it."

"That's completely normal. At a certain stage of puberty, usually a late stage, three out of five boys are more frightened of religion than they are of ghosts. What else?"

"Those are the main things. I suppose his nationalism's quite natural."

"Is it?"

He moved, bent down, caught an end of rope and began to fiddle with it.

"I sometimes doubt if it's ever natural. If you mean aggressive

nationalism, I don't know. Rome and Carthage—possibly. There are other cases, you might say France and Germany, perhaps. You've read your Trotter? I don't know if he's right—the sociologists don't ever agree. What I do say is that aggressive patriotism as we generally know it is largely artificial. It may be deeply rooted in early causes. That would be it in this case. But it's not born in you. Love of your country's a natural sentiment and a noble one. When you attach labels to things you kill them, and that's what's happened—they called it patriotism, and up came the schoolma'ams and the scoutmasters and confused it with half a dozen other instincts and made it into a mawkish moralism. And the egoists all urged them on. By the time the Sunday-schools had done with patriotism it was a thing no decent, wholly sane man would own up to."

"But they do," I said.

He ignored me.

"What I mean is this. There's a hopeless confusion between what is and what ought to be, and between affection and the herd instinct. It's that muddleheadedness that makes raw material for all the evil in the world. There's an army of people, a small army but a powerful one, who use it just as they want to—financiers and landowners and steel magnates and Prussian junkers and owners of the blasted newspapers—they mix up the pure wholesome passion a man has for his fellow-countrymen and his native scenery with greed and fear and mass-passion and a streak of viciousness that's left in us from the brutes, and they stir it into a hotpot and give it a label, and they have the incomparable impudence to call it a virtue. Then it's ladled out to Sunday-school teachers and they pump it into infants like vaccine. As for its being natural—well, you might say that a prairie fire is natural, since it just goes like hell without anyone pushing it, but you'd hardly say it was unnatural for a prairie *not* to be on fire, would you? Well, it goes all right, with a few drums and brass instruments to warm it up. You get a few thousand widows left to look after themselves, and a certain amount of insanity and starvation and suicide, and we're all very proud of what the boys did, and the financiers are all right, they had their boodle in the right spot all the time." His face was close to mine, but he was not looking at me. His head was turned slightly, his eyes must have been fixed on something in the water. If I did not see, I felt the ferocity in them. His voice was lower again. "I tell you, John, that's my idea of sin. When I hear the word 'sin' that's what I think of. And I'm not sure that I don't believe in an old-fashioned Devil working the whole bloody thing through his callous agents. I'm

not talking hot air, I've been an attaché, I've been in the Foreign Office, I saw a lot of the war, I've travelled since. When I think of some of the platitudes I've heard talked in sermons and mess-rooms, and when I think of what Ypres looked like and what Vienna looks like now, and when I remember some of the field-surgery they did in a hurry, it's a damned sight easier to believe in a great live personal Devil than in any of the Canons of History. And if you ask me what's the Devil's best weapon I should say it was the nauseating claptrap the riggers call 'patriotism.' You can say that the thing's common and catching, like smallpox, but I won't have it called 'natural.' That's an insult to God."

His voice was still quiet and controlled, but I could feel the boat shaking with his fury. We fell immediately into silence, for there was nothing for me to say, and he, I think, was shy after his outburst. But presently I felt his hand on my wrist, and a little later, in a strained voice, as if he had been crying, he said: "Sorry I'm so garrulous. You didn't deserve it. I only meant that Klaus isn't beyond cure. The poison was put in and it can be got out. I think it will be. You're keeping him, that's the main thing. As long as you're keeping him you're doing the good work all the time."

A light breeze came suddenly. Lanair, seizing the lines in one quick movement, caught it. It flagged, seemed to vanish, and revived. The sail tautened, we began to move gently forward, and soon my ears caught a faint gurgle from the water as the bow disturbed it.

It was too dark now to see the bank, and added to the darkness there were wisps of fog which, as they crossed our path, catching our lights for a moment, made me feel as if we were sailing straight into a solid wall. Upon Lanair's instructions I stood by the centre-board to heave it the moment we touched. But it was only an extra precaution. There were pricks of light on the south bank appearing and disappearing as the little clouds ran past us; occasionally we saw nearer lights; and for Lanair these were enough. Even when we came to a patch of mist so thick that we could hardly see the reflection of the lights in the water, he steered with apparent confidence, while I, nervously holding the centre-board, counted the seconds till we were clear. I do not know how long that eerie journey lasted, but I remember that I was nearly sleeping, in a comfortless, day-time doze, when I heard Lanair say—"I'm afraid I've not been much help about Klaus. I'm sorry. I do know how you feel." Almost immediately afterwards I heard, quite close, a thick voice singing *When the snowdrop drops, we'll*

all drop, and coming out of another belt of fog I saw bright lights a few feet away.

I heard a boatman say: "It was no day to do it, sir, not a day like this has been," and Lanair: "She must have a bran mash, Bob, and a hot-water bottle."

"It was decent of you to come," he said to me, "I'm afraid it's been rather a bore for you."

Grumbling about a nail in his shoe, he collected some of the gear and climbed out on to the raft. I followed him sleepily.

I had a letter from him two days later, saying that he had been a swine, that he had jumped down my throat with a lot of callow philosophizing when I had only asked him a simple question, and so on; adding, "but you know how it is, when one's alone with a man, how one uses him as an overflow valve. Those weeks we had in hospital together—God! how I must have bored you! . . ." The truth, however, was that he could not have brought me better comfort. It was I who had used him as a safety-valve, and I was not too pessimistic to see the force of his words—"as long as he stays with you." Peggy could not have treated him more affectionately or with more delicate understanding had he been her own son. Our servants took pains to consider his comforts. Others were kind to him. Elaine Chelcote, in particular, went out of her way to interest and please him; and realizing that with her mother's social connections and her father's money she could have her choice of half the young men in London to entertain her if she wished, I was touched by her generosity in bestowing so much sweetness upon a German boy who could not respond in full measure to her charm, even if he were conscious of it. The fact that he was suspicious of me did not matter; except to myself, and that was unimportant. If I were a lay figure—a rather obtrusive lay figure, its presence and its genial impotence fraying the nerves—there were others to do better the work I had set out to do. Klaus had freedom, and a little money of his own; and he stayed with us. That, surely, was sufficient.

But for a week we lost him. A week of unbroken nightmare. He went for a walk by himself one evening (as he did frequently) and did not come back. It was a cloudy night, no moon, and for hours I wandered about the Heath, thinking that he might have lost himself and vaguely hoping that by making twenty different circuits I should run across him or hear something from loafers. We telephoned to the Bennets, to Elaine, to other friends whose houses

he had visited. I made cautious inquiries at the local police station, with no result. At about three in the morning, leaving the front door unbolted and the hall light on, we went to bed. When we got up, without having slept, we felt as if we had come into a new kind of winter, a lifeless world in which things and people moved, made noises, but only by clockwork habit, without purpose or meaning. At breakfast we ate little, talked in low voices, did not laugh. We scanned the paper, half-hoping that by some miracle it would give us a clue, ignoring the news. I went to work (we were busy at the time) leaving Peggy white-faced and weary-eyed. I suppose I dictated letters, signed letters, interviewed people, held conversations on the telephone, and that Miss Gay saved me from making any appalling blunders. I doubt if, throughout the week, my mind was ever really focussed on what I was doing.

We were quite helpless. For the most part the ordinary channels of inquiry were closed to us. Official interest in the affair would have led to more complications than I could contemplate. The Yard, which has a journalist's curiosity about the remotest details of the cases under its notice, might have made searching inquiry into my Deed of Guardianship. At least one of the newspapers, one that had lately brought me into unaccustomed limelight by daily denunciation of an Act for which I was considered responsible and had used me as a text for the damning of Bureaucracy, would be warmly interested in the affair. Klaus, when the suggestive force of a million-circulation had done its work overnight, might be changed from a "Youth Missing" into a fugitive from justice. With a machinery at my disposal for publicity and rapid communication such as no other age had dreamed of, I could actually do no more than talk to constables, scrutinize the suburban Press, and make private inquiries among friends—police-officers, East End missionaries, harbour chaplains—who by the one chance in a thousand might hear some news. We did not know how much money he had taken with him, but I thought that by some means or other he might have got back to Germany. Beneath his dreamy exterior I had detected signs of a certain cunning as well as resolution in his character, and he had, I knew, some small ability as a rough sailor. I wrote to Ernst Gotthold (with whom I kept up an intermittent correspondence) and asked him to keep a watch on the German provincial papers; also to Bennett Williams, as I thought Klaus might possibly have been drawn back to Birnewald. I subscribed to two English and one international cuttings agencies. Peggy found amusing books for me, took more than her usual

care over my meals, pretended that her own appetite was perfect and that she was not lying awake through half the night. Each time I saw the word "Suicide" in the papers my breath caught and I felt sick.

On the eighth day after his disappearance, at about eleven in the morning, my telephone rang and instinct told me that there was news. (I suppose that instinct had told me the same thing on each of the two hundred occasions before, but I still believed it.) As I grabbed at the receiver I heard Hugo's voice: "He's back!"

I resisted the impulse to go to Pasture Green straight away—that, I believed, would be unwise—and contented myself with telephoning to Peggy. I went home early, and a little before the usual time Klaus arrived, driven by Hugo in the touring-car. In the evening, when we were alone in my study, Hugo gave me a fuller account; but there was little enough to tell. Returning to the shed after trying out a car he had tuned, he found Klaus working on the bench; his clothes rather untidy, his shoes caked with mud. He had said nothing, except: "You look hungry, Klaus. Like some biscuits to keep you going?" to which Klaus had answered, looking ravenous, "Thank you, but I will wait till lunch. I am busy."

"And you've no idea where he's been?" I asked.

"None whatever. I should imagine he just—went for a walk." He shrugged his shoulders, and I understood, at least partially, what he meant. "I feel like that myself sometimes," he added, "only I've got Mollie, if you see what I mean."

He tapped his forehead, and I changed the subject.

Klaus told us nothing; we did not press him: I am not sure if he himself knew clearly where he had tramped, and when we talked about it, months afterwards, he could only remember the general direction—no detail of his adventures. He had returned to London by train. We made no restrictions upon his freedom, no alteration in routine, and I had not the courage even to speak of the matter to him. But while I talked to Hugo, Peggy and he were in the drawing-room together, and she, in words or by the tired expression in her face, told him something of the week's anxiety she had undergone. He was touched, and he made a simple apology. They said no more, but Peggy told me, in bed that night, that he would not leave us again. If her words wanted proof, I saw it in Klaus's deepened affection towards her. She, with her almost divine skill in sympathy, had made something of constructive value out of the adventure which to her had been so costly.

On the next pay-day Hugo reduced the amount of Klaus's wage by the equivalent of the days he had been absent. Klaus nodded and said nothing.

To make amends to Charles—for my conscience was pricked—I gave him lunch at the Museum of Impossibilities. He always enjoyed a meal there, believing (poor fellow) that it was rather a distinguished institution; it was, but not in the way he imagined. "I wish I could afford the subscription," he said sometimes, and he could have done so, but I concealed from him the fact that it was ludicrously small. "I notice you've got a lot of parsons," he would add. We had, but they were peculiar parsons. If the qualifications for membership had been integrity, good humour and good breeding, I should have nominated Charles long since. But these virtues were not specially required.

He said, at the end of a fairly long passage descriptive of hot shower-baths and other amenities of Canadian Pacific trains: "This really is awfully nice wine. Is it some sort of claret? Have you still got what's-his-name, that German boy, staying with you?"

I said: "Klaus? Yes."

"It's frightfully broadminded of you," he said.

"Broadminded?"

"I mean, the feeling still goes on. I know it shouldn't. I'm always blazing away about uncharitableness. But in your position I should have thought—still, of course I admire you for it."

I had to break off a large piece of bread and swallow it hastily. It is unfair to have grown up with a man, and when Charles attacked broad ethical problems I could never prevent my nostrils from sniffing a faint aroma of T. B. Reed. Fancying myself in that rôle of unexampled heroism, the boy who waters the hobbies garden belonging to a member of another house who is in bed with chicken-pox, I wanted to laugh outright.

"You'd better be careful with that fish," I said, "they sometimes leave bones in it."

"I mean," he pursued, "the papers seem to have rather got their knife into you, and with all this about 'Remember 1914' they might use this business as a lever——"

I said, rather pompously: "The papers are an instrument for governing public opinion—not my actions. I'm a sheltered bureaucrat, I don't depend on the Press Lords for my living, and I don't care two drops of water in Hell what the papers say."

(But I did care, since Klaus read the papers.)

Pouring oil on the waters he seemed to have troubled, Charles said: "Of course, yes. I mean, of course not." Then: "You've never told me properly how you came to know the boy."

"He's the son of an old friend," I said. "It's a long story, rather a dull one."

"Someone you knew before the war, at—where was it?—Heidelberg?"

"Yes."

"How long's the boy going to be with you?"

"I don't know yet. Don't let that stuff get cold, it's foul when it's cold. More wine?"

"Er—no—yes, please!"

He drank off what was left in his glass as carelessly as if it were beer. On the face of General Reeves, lunching by himself a few yards away, I saw a look of petrification.

"Talking of newspapers," Charles said, "our local paper printed a splendid account of the Lads' Club gym display. The editor's very decent to us, gives us a lot of free publicity. That sort of thing's a great help, these days. You've no idea how difficult it is. . . ."

I had a very good idea of it; of the dull, ugly, neo-suburban little town, the bleak gymnasium, the deadening routine, the meanness, smallness, and brutal apathy. But I listened, with dwindling self-esteem, as he told me.

My memory, which in trifling affairs often serves me with astonishing fidelity and often plays jackass when I need and rightly ask its service, gives me vividly the smell and colour of the last few weeks before those I spent in hospital; the events only as solitary peaks, rising from a cloudy valley, standing, for all I know, in the wrong positions. Those weeks—when the weather was still frosty, when the snowdrop tune was brought to my ears by every wind that blew, and played, when all voices were silent, by a little gramophone that had sprouted like a tumour inside my head—are separated from me by a space of time in which everything was white and smelling of Jeyes' Fluid; in which men and women, nearly always in that same negative colour, loomed up at me out of the sleepy shadows, did things to me, gave me excruciating pain and gentle comfort, asked me a question, always the same question, "How do you feel now?"; in which, as the shadows grew lighter and I saw objects separately, beds and beds and white glass-topped tables and more beds, Lanair's

face, close to mine, said: "It was all right, old boy. We kept the police out. We hushed it up. It was all right." It is, perhaps, that tune, that feeble, maddening, devastating tune, which by its torturing insistence has coupled and blended those white days with the ones which passed immediately before. For it seems to me now that I was not wholly and consecutively conscious in any of those weeks; from the time of Klaus's return to the day when, muffled up as if it were mid-winter, I was motored down to Hastings and presented a ludicrous spectacle to the world by staggering, with Peggy and Klaus supporting me on either side, up the steps of a respectable hotel. The dividing line is clear enough. But the numbness and uncertainty which started in the corridor of the Angel seem to have spilt over and stained a strip of life on the other side.

Until the day of the accident I must have been busy. The diary which Miss Gay keeps in her beautiful brevier longhand, records an abundance of interviews and committees; and the Reinstatement Bill, of which I had pressed the claims upon succeeding generations of bored Under-Secretaries, actually went through its second reading a few days after I was admitted to hospital. A man called Theet-Pricehart had been giving us more trouble than smiling fortune ever permitted another, before or since, to give to a Government department. I forget what all the trouble was about, as I have forgotten everything about Mr. Theet-Pricehart except his delicious name. But I have kept, among my amusing personalia, a copy of one of the more enterprising newspapers in which his arrest is recorded; and by an odd chance there appears, in that very issue, on that very page, a charmingly-written obituary notice which some too eager sub-editor had inserted to round off my own span of days.

There was a bustle in the air, plenty of news, a political excitement which might have had some consequence had not a sanguinary murder at Croydon, which was deemed to have peculiarly interesting features, diverted the public attention. Whereas in the old days nothing had mattered very much, however intrinsically important, if it took place far enough away, now everything mattered; the nation was stirred about the Honnett Town affair in Queensland to such an extent that extra postmen had to be put on in the Fleet Street area. There was an outcry about an "impertinent" leader in a Berlin newspaper. "Had the lesson not been learned?" Britain asked. It was agreed among all sober and farsighted people that it was perfectly possible for workers in slumped trades to keep a wife and three children on fourteen shillings a week. And we were profoundly moved on learning that a Russian lady of title had been

forced to sell her chrysoberyl bracelets to pay for her divorce from a Canadian surveyor. It is, perhaps, a monumental tribute to human egoism, that in a world that heaved and dithered with such varied excitements the events that found a permanent place in my mind are those that have no place in history. A tall, Italian waiter with a moustache in two tiny bristling pieces will not remember a little party he served in the Old Coventry one night, when there was a light snow falling, and when a glass of hock was spilt over the tablecloth; for there was no distinguished person among the three men and two women, events were not changed by their meeting, the meal was not vouchsafed even the passing celebrity of a mention in the next day's social columns. But I remember him, his dark eyes, his rather cynical mouth, his skilful hands, though he had left that restaurant when I next dined there; and only because he formed part of a living cameo, in which, as I look at it again, I hear Elaine's voice saying: "You're so smart to-night, Klaus, they'll take you for a waiter if you aren't careful," and Klaus's reply, ponderously good-humoured, "That would be a grave dishonour to place upon a skilful motor-mechanic." I remember that we had a curious dish made with lobsters and some sort of macaroni, that Peggy was wearing her silver ninon dress, and that David, who was with us, told us a weighty humorous story about the funeral of the Laird of Achendrean.

It was on that evening, I think, that we saw *King Lear* at the Leinster. The play bored me as it has never done before or since. Stephen Brougham's Lear, that everyone was praising, seemed to me a slobberer, more like an Irish peasant farmer given to self-indulgence than a great man destroyed; but perhaps I had been too cheerful at dinner to digest my food properly, or perhaps I was already too far advanced in years to attune myself to what, at the time, I thought was the grafting of a spurious Ibsen technique on to a tradition that would not take it. Peggy said that she had never seen Lear played more sympathetically, Elaine was at any rate moved to actual tears, and David's comments were drily favourable. Only Klaus agreed with me. "It is only real," he whispered, "it is not tragic. It has no force. I am disappointed." I was secretly glad, for *Richard II* and *Henry V* had both stirred him, and though I was not honest enough to admit it then, I took him to the Leinster season as much to proselytize as to entertain him. He might take his choice, I told myself; but he should not, if I could prevent it, go without some insight into the gracious, the earthy, warm-coloured, lusty growing of a people that was, after all, a half-part of his inheritance.

He liked the theatre, when it was serious. Comedy made no great appeal to him, for even now it went too fast for him to take in the lines, and when the pieces were set between Park Lane salons and the terraces of Monte Carlo he could not, living as he did with middle-class people who had no great pretensions to wealth or amorality, appreciate a convention founded upon idleness and easy manners. Farce he disliked. *The Private Secretary*, which was running for a Christmas season that would extend into August, struck him as not only silly but slightly sinful. On the other hand, he laughed outright at *Charley's Aunt*. But music was his chief pleasure. We went to many concerts together, good and bad; sometimes alone, often with Peggy or with Elaine, who was a pains-taking amateur and who, having made Klaus her protégé, liked to watch him as he leaned forward in rapt attention, sometimes clicking his tongue in mild annoyance at a scherzo coarsely handled, sometimes carried away by sheer sensuous enjoyment. At the Queen's and the Wigmore Hall we were both his pupils, Elaine and I. And on the way back to Elaine's flat he would sometimes lecture us, explaining our dullness in praising the pieces which had been done badly, asking, with a sorrowful note in his voice, if we had not observed the exquisite undertone of the 'cellos in a Mozart sonata. He had no critical vocabulary, but he tried to make his meaning clear with hybrid polysyllables and whistling and impromptu pantomime, his English rushing out in such a cascade that we wondered, smiling behind our attentive faces, how we could ever have thought him shy and taciturn. How far his criticism was sound I could not guess, even when I understood his meaning, for my mind absorbs music slowly and will not concentrate throughout an evening. He gave me the impression of precocity and of a training that had been broken off prematurely. Yet I could not doubt his sincerity or the quickness of his response. It would be possible, I believed, to make a connoisseur of him. But acquainted as I was with so many connoisseurs, who were almost *ipso facto* qualified for membership of the Museum, and whose catholicity so often passed from æstheticism into pure snobbery, I would almost have preferred him to keep his happiness as a dilettante.

At first he had thought little of the apparatus of a festive evening. It either bored or bewildered him. He had as yet no real taste for English or for French cooking. A restaurant humming with the chatter of thirty tables made it difficult for him to listen to the talk at his own. His eyes passed over evening dresses with an expression partly puritan and partly childlike. But in time, concomitantly with his increased attention to his own smartness, he became aware

that pretty clothes and well-arranged lighting possessed an infectious cheerfulness. When it was not too cold we would all take a turn in the streets round Piccadilly and Shaftesbury Avenue when the theatres were emptying. Elaine, reared in the stern and tramway-ridden provinces, always enjoyed the gaiety. To me it was spurious, a pathetic attempt to pretend that the war had not happened. I wondered if, in 1913, the men's faces had really been so smooth and bored and vacant, or those of the women so white and hard. Yet the very courage of the masquerade compelled me; the disdainful unawareness of the parties walking to their cars right through the crowd that moved along the pavement; the impudence of rich cloaks reflecting the lights of the foyers, against a background of shabby touts and flysheets and the drab London architecture rising into the strident, joyous vulgarity of neon night-signs; the long, gleaming bonnets of the cars that slid through the crowds in the roadway as swift and quiet as yachts on the Solent—such a pageant of incongruity, unreal as when I dreamed of it at St. Amand, held me fascinated, as a child is fascinated by the window of a toyshop. As to Klaus, from sheer blindness he came to curiosity and bewilderment, at last to industrious scrutiny. What he thought of it I did not know. But I could see that he observed carefully, that some impression was being made on that extraordinary mind of his. I noticed that his eyes flashed constantly towards the darker figures on the outskirts of the monde, and I thought I saw, sometimes, a smile of bitterness and contempt on his lips. But it was he, on more than one occasion, who said: "Let us walk now, and see the people in their dress clothes," and when a concert had been very good, or a play had so worked on his mind as to make it sympathetic with a prevailing atmosphere, his expression of critical observer would relax, and he would walk with a certain sprightliness, as if trying and secretly enjoying the sensation of superficiality. I remember that one evening, when the Bennets were with us, Hugo caught him by the arm to point out a car of many cylinders that was just pulling up to the kerb. At first Klaus would not look; his eyes lingered upon a window through which young men and women could be seen drinking Pilsner out of tall glasses. Then, with only a glance at the expensive vehicle, "It contains," he said, "an ugly lady." Nothing more.

He enjoyed music, that we knew. He enjoyed doing what men do with oil and spanners, he enjoyed reading, and he seemed to enjoy our company. Certainly he expressed gratitude, in his grave, courteous way, whenever we took special pains for his comfort or enjoyment. But his detachment, the taciturnity into which he always lapsed after a spurt of conversation, were such that I could not be certain

if he regarded us as his adopted relations, our home as his own, or if he were only striving from common courtesy to be pleasant to hosts who conveniently housed him until he had foothold from which to follow his own plans. Peggy, I think, was able to penetrate a little way into his mind's fortress. There could be nothing false, only a hesitation and shyness in his relation with her. She was a separate being, placed only by accident in foreign surroundings, too universal to be hedged by an equipment of foreign speech and manners. Yet it was Elaine who roused him most easily, to whom he would pay attention even when she talked lightly, whose laughter most readily made him smile and whose wishes he would obey most promptly. I believed then that it was because she alone respected his secrecy, tried only to amuse and not to understand him. He was of her own generation, and with the new genius that that generation had found she met him upon an equal footing. She teased him gently, and if he did not understand it he would still smile at her teasing. She ventured even to laugh at his German mannerisms and to correct his speech. He did not mind the one, he profited from the other. When Lady Chelcote wrote, as she did from time to time, effusively to thank us for our kindness to her daughter, I felt that if Elaine's charm alone had not repaid us, the pains she took over Klaus's education were worth more than all the meals we gave her and all her hours at our fireside.

Had I known that a curtain was to fall so abruptly upon those days I might have relished them more consciously, have overridden the nagging melancholy which I suffered then and which dimmed their brightest moments. But sometimes I think that I did know vaguely, by that hazy and unfathomable intuition which is said to warn sailors as they start on their last voyage. For just as the summer of 1914 remains with me in moments of the utmost sweetness—days on the river at Streasley, a sunset over Southwold common, bathing with Peggy in Vryan Bay—heightened and sharpened by the vague apprehension that was even then stealing over us, so those scenes that stand out against the background of cold short days like lighted rooms seen from a railway train—Klaus's grave face as Elaine poured words at him across a table in the Dorset, the swinging lights of the taxicabs as they jockeyed for places in the Circus—are brought back in greater brilliance and intensity than moments which take an ordered place in another part of my private history. And I believe that already Klaus and I were nearer together than we imagined; for as he still seemed to grope his way in a world not wholly familiar, so was I groping. In the crowds that passed us, bright for a moment against the headlamps of cars or in the streaming lights of a theatre,

we looked for our friends and saw only strangers. I started, sometimes, when I saw a face I recognized, and realized that the man was dead. I turned my eyes, again and again, when those of a stranger curiously sought them, and I could not be certain if it were indeed a stranger. We were both a little afraid of darkness, as we were a little afraid of each other. We walked side by side, but we never held each other's hands. We saw, both, what the others did not see. But we thought, each of us, that it was only his own pursuing fantasy.

XVI

THE Government owed me a day's holiday, since I had been forced by pressure of work to spend the whole of Boxing Day in the office; there was still plenty to do, but by working an extra hour every evening I was gradually overtaking it, and towards the end of February temptation proved too strong. "There's quite a touch of spring in the air," Miss Gay told me. She was, I thought, a little over-punctual with that observation; perhaps she was deceived by the advertisements, which had been crying spring wares for a long time now and would soon (if I knew my Terry and Poms) be forecasting the modes for autumn; or perhaps it was only her own unremitting determination to keep herself—and me if possible—in advance of time. ("If you haven't any more letters, Sir John, I think we might just run through the agenda for the October committee. I've got that down for next week, but it's a pity not to fill up time.") Botanically Miss Gay was wrong, for everything was late that year and the trees were still as bare as Rubens' cherubs. But since the day when she had quietly informed me (as I was about to leave the office for a royal audience) that I had overlooked a large inkstain on my left cheek, I had listened with respectful attention to everything Miss Gay said. Certainly it was not so cold, some shares I held had gone up a point, and as I sniffed the petrol fumes at Charing Cross I thought I could detect a faint smell of the first spring days. Returning to the office after luncheon I was conscious of a discontent with the box-files and the white blotting-paper, and I wrote the words "seed catalogue" in the space devoted by my diary to the week's memoranda.

It was in this mood that Lanair caught me when, choosing the time of day which I hold sacred to Under-Secretaries and such impedimenta of my duty, he rang up the Ministry and cajoled an inexperienced operator to put him through.

"I hear," he said, "that you are out of school next Thursday. But yes, it says so in to-day's *Gazette*. My proposal is that you should take me to a place called Tillinglade, which is near Luton. The charm of the scenery is noted, and sandwiches will be provided. I wish"—(he said upon my further inquiry)—"to transport munitions."

It transpired, when I had reduced him to straight prose, that he

wanted to return to its owner, who lived at Tillinglade, a service revolver that he had borrowed some time before (I think for use in France). "I've a box of cartridges to go with it," he said, "and one can't very easily send the dam' things by post, and I'd rather like to see old Minifie again, and anyway what's the good of your having a car if you keep it rusting in a pot-house all the time?"

I promised to ring up and say "Yes" or "No" in the evening, and I made up my mind when, glancing through *The Times* after dinner, I saw that on Thursday the Northampton Nomads were meeting a regimental team on the new ground near Shefford. In my young days I had played for the Nomads, and big-chested men talking in groups on their way back to the station at Twickenham still referred to "Saggard of the Nomads" in tones of wistful awe. (The reference, alas, was to Charles, whose Nomadic career was longer and far brighter than mine.) I said on the telephone: "If you'll come to Shefford with me I'll go to Tillinglade with you." Lanair had no proper understanding of rugby, having had the misfortune to be educated at Eton, but he did not mind watching it. "We shall kill one bird each," he agreed, and we arranged a rendezvous.

When Thursday came there was a drizzling rain, but soon after ten it began to clear. We should get some sunshine, I thought, but the ground would be sticky and it would be a forwards' game. I rang up the Ministry, and to my relief nothing of importance had come in. After spending nearly as much energy on the cranking-handle as would have taken me into Bedfordshire on a push-bicycle, I made the Vauxhall start. I picked up Lanair at Swiss Cottage and drove to Pasture Green, where Klaus had insisted on doing a morning's work and where the Bennets were giving us an early luncheon. Peggy was not with us. She had promised, weeks before, to open an exhibition at Knightsbridge of cripples' work, and would not have defaulted to attend my funeral. It was a shadow on my day, for if Peggy loves anything better than a first-class tenor it is a fast three-quarter. But the sun was out before we reached Pasture Green, so I could not grumble.

I tried to persuade Hugo to lock up the outfit and come with us; there was plenty of room for him and Mollie. But he would not hear of it. On a fine Thursday, he said, the prosperous shopkeepers took the air in their Morris-Cowleys, and business might be brisk.

"They all stall their engines at the corner," he said, as we sat down, "and I charge a tanner a time for telling them they can't restart with the lever still engaged in top."

It was a squash, five of us in the Bennets' dining-room, and there was hardly room for all the necessary plates and implements on the

small round table. I should have to get them a larger place, I thought, put it down as a capital investment, charge a small rent and increase Hugo's wages. They wanted more china, too. I should have to remember that at Easter.

"I suppose I oughtn't to ask," Mollie was saying to Lanair, "because men never like it, but I do want to know how you got the D.S.O. Klaus told me you were one."

"I am always happy and proud to tell any lady," Lanair answered. "It was the proudest incident of my life. It happened at Aldershot. I appeared on parade at a general inspection wearing a green ribbon round my neck, denoting my membership of the Illustrious League of Lemonade Lappers. When the Field-Marshal came to me he roared 'Who is this man? Take his name and telephone number!' I unshipped bayonet, bringing my thumbs to the seat of the trousers on the word 'three'! and took a pace forward out of the ranks. 'Field-Marshal!' I said, 'I promised my mother that I would wear it night and day.' I saw a tear come into his eye. 'Where would we be without our mothers?' he asked softly. The sergeant-major couldn't tell him, never having had one. 'You are a brave man,' the Field-Marshal went on, 'it takes courage, grit, aye and effort too, to remember one's mother's words.' Then he put his hand in his trouser-pocket, and fished out a handful of D.S.O.'s. 'Which colour would you like?' he asked. 'Green,' I said, and added softly 'for remembrance. It is the colour of your eyes.' Afterwards I was chaired all round the barrack square, and the next day. . . ."

Hugo, sitting next to me, was saying in a low voice: ". . . better and better. Born mechanic. Seems to know the job by instinct. . . . Oh yes, a good grounding, but if he could get to Cambridge and take an engineering Trip . . . yes, there'd be a job for him all right. It's the big stuff he's made for—won't be happy all his life tinkering with antique Chevrolets."

"I don't mean him to," I said, "or you either. When things get better——"

"I'm happy enough," he said gruffly.

I looked from his face—long and tight-skinned, eyes deep-pitted and fiercely browed, a mouth still boyish under the wide, close-cut moustache—to Mollie's, and wondered if she were happy enough. But her features told me nothing; pretty, candid, rather childish; it was hard, as she sat listening to Lanair with wide eyes and lips smiling, to remember the resolution that I had sometimes seen there, the ferocity of her when a chance remark bearing on some social question changed her suddenly into a fighter.

"But you must admit," she was saying to Lanair, "that a married man has some advantages over a bachelor. When you're in a foul temper you can't curse your servants, because they'll just give notice, and if you curse your dog it doesn't understand. With a wife——"

"With a wife," said Hugo, "you pay in kind by finding every single button gone from your pants and——"

"But I tell you," Lanair said, "if I could find one of the correct shape I'd have it. The only ones I find that go with my suits are always married already——"

"My dear Hugo," Mollie interrupted, "when have you ever taken the trouble to tell me that your pants?—Klaus, be a darling and get the pudding—and when have I ever. . . ?"

"I will obtain the pudding," Klaus said, squeezing himself past our chairs.

"It comes to this," Hugo said heavily, "you can't have it both ways——"

"Hugo, darling, if you'd just take the vegetable dishes from the Captain—I don't mind my visitors doing all the work, but I can't afford new vegetable dishes——"

"I'm sorry, Captain. Here, let me——"

"Let me help!" said Lanair, not moving.

"And yet," I said, when we were settled again, "if you saw Lanair trying to darn his own socks, you'd think that he was a brand-new widower—or else a gardener who'd been left out too long in the sun. The socks afterwards——"

"My dear old friend," Lanair said patiently, "it hurts me to say so, but if you and Munchausen were entered together for a competition in falsehood, Munchausen would throw in the towel at the end of the first chukker. And to think of all I've done for this man! D'you know, I was staying once with the Archbishop of Canterbury—the old one—what was his name?—Tomkins, Archbishop Tomkins, and he came to me one day after breakfast with a face like a fish who's died from natural causes and a pair of episcopal socks in one hand. 'Lanair,' he said brokenly, 'there's not a soul in this screaming palace who can darn socks. . . .'"

"I'd love to come, Captain," Mollie said (Klaus, proudly and very daintily, was superintending the coffee), "but I can't leave Hugo all alone, and he won't budge when he smells business. In the summer we'll put Klaus in charge, with a man to help him, and have a week in Cornwall. . . ."

"Excuse me, please, I cannot remember if Major Lanair likes his coffee black or white, and he is so busy telling untruths to Hugo that he cannot inform me. . . ."

We were off soon after one, Klaus driving.

"And you'll please be careful, my son," Lanair admonished him. "I've got a valuable revolver in the back here, not to speak of a whole box of ruddy cartridges which'll all go off if you hit a charabanc."

Klaus was in excellent spirits. He had learnt, at last, to enjoy Lanair, even if he could not follow half of what he said. He drove carefully, as Hugo had taught him, signalling punctiliously when he turned to right or left, but his gaze on the road ahead was no longer that of a blinkered horse. From Elstree onwards he actually sang, a very weird hymn of praise in Latin, which the composer (I thought) had meant to be decently lugubrious but which Klaus's voice made brisk and cheerful.

Lanair sang too, *The snowdrop's popping up, up*, until I stopped him. We overtook a Lancia which was missing on one or two cylinders and arrived at Shefford very happy.

The new ground, a mile or so outside the town, had been made as headquarters for Services football, and with the stands already erected took twenty-five thousand comfortably. It was surprisingly full when we arrived, for the Nomads had beaten a strong side at Richmond the week before and the Bedford fifteen included four Army caps. A parking-ground almost as large as the stadium itself was half full; many of the cars had a London look, and I saw Ian MacCullagh's among them. Having paid at the turnstiles I found one, Jerry Pond, who had been groundsman to the Nomads in his younger days and still served them as trainer. For the matter of five shillings he got me three seats reserved for associate members, plumb in the middle of the east stand.

"It pays to be a great man," I said, sitting down to watch the mob jostling on the terraces below.

"It costs five shillings," Lanair retorted. "And we're too high to see properly. I like to see the fellows' faces in the scrum, not just the tops of their bottoms."

The ends of the ground were still almost empty, but on both sides there seemed to be not a foot of space anywhere. Yet the crowd was still pouring in steadily, and somehow the close ranks still absorbed it. We had twelve minutes still to wait. I started to pump the rudiments into Klaus at high pressure.

"You see the line on which the goal stands. The object of each side is to touch the ball down behind that line at the opposite end. When they——"

"The object of each side," said Lanair leaning across me, "is to twist the necks of the other side. For this purpose——"

"——and you're not allowed to throw the ball forward, only to kick it forward or to throw it back. So when the three-quarter. . ."

Many of the spectators had been standing for two hours or more, and the restlessness of the last few minutes began to show in a rippling movement, in a multiplication of the little sparks which twinkled each time a cigarette was lit, in a hoarse cheer when a press photographer fell down in the muddy out-field and broke his tripod. Some donkey started to sing, and in half a minute every fourth man in the crowd was singing:

*The snowdrop's shooting up, up,
The snowdrop'll soon be through*

The anthem dithered its way round the field in both directions, and as the crowd on our side caught it from two sources they uttered it in two distinct times. The noise increased in volume and heterogeneity. Lanair joined in, in a broken bass. Klaus looked at me, his eyes asking if this were any fixed part of the ritual I had been at such pains to show him. But now that the tune had become lost altogether in the throaty cacophony I was enjoying it. The stands were packed tight now, a dark mass flecked with spots of pink and little puffs of smoke, divided by the smooth green. The sun had disappeared behind grey clouds, allowing solemnity. I was not, as I had feared, too old.

The singing collapsed into a hush of expectancy, which cracked again to a roar as the Regiment came out. A formidable lot, heavy. "They'll pull 'em to bits, all right!" Lanair shouted in my ear. The Nomads followed, and I yelled for them. "Now for God's sake don't be hearty!" Lanair cautioned, "that's more than I can stand." In the moment of silence which followed while the captains were tossing I heard someone say, two rows behind: "You see that tall man in front with the odd-shaped head? I believe that's Saggard's brother."

The ball rose high, a three-quarter took it, missed touch, and another lofted kick brought it back. A scramble ended in a knock-on. It was going to be a dull game, I feared.

Too old, perhaps, after all. The intervening four years, the four years lost, made too much difference. I didn't really mind who won, the panorama was all I cared about, the excitement had to be felt at second hand. But glancing along the row I saw that I was not the oldest. Just beyond the befurred girl who was petulantly asking questions, sat a white-bearded man in a high-buttoned coat and a black Homburg. He was leaning forward,

and his eyes were sparkling. He constantly started, as if about to stand up, but each time a twinge of gout or rheumatism forced him back into his seat. He groaned when the Nomads fumbled, he shouted in his thin voice when a man was cleanly tackled. I recognized him, a Greats don from Magdalen.

Klaus was hurling questions at me. Why was the referee blowing his whistle now? Why had that man shouted "Mark!"? What were they doing all standing in a queue? At intervals, when the noise had subsided for a moment, Lanair shouted: "Come on, the blinkin' army! Pick 'em up, there, pick 'em up!" Between shame and duty I was not observing the game too closely. The ball seemed to be all in the Nomads' twenty-five. They cleared it in long kicks, which as often missed touch as found it, and it was back every time before they could follow it. The Regiment was hustling them, and they had no cohesion. Disappointing. It was only a matter of time. ("No, old man, you can only tackle a man when he's got the ball—Jchoshaphat!") A Nomad forward tried to clear again, mis-kicked, and punted the ball gently into the hands of the Regiment's inside three-quarter. He dodged one man and ran obliquely towards the flag, curved in, and placed the ball without much haste behind the starboard goalpost. A minute later an easy kick had converted the try. The Nomads, straggling out from their alignment, looked more bewildered than pained. We shouted "Nomads!" but not so hopefully, and in less than three minutes the Regiment was over again.

"No, when the ball's near your own line you've got to keep it close." (The kick went wide.) "If you don't, their three-quarters get hold of it and it makes an easy run for them. You want to keep it at your feet and——"

What were they doing now? Couldn't get the grovel straight. In again. Someone's foot up, free kick for Nomads. Nothing gained, another scrum. The ground was not as good as it had looked, the ball was greasy and the men were slipping. On the Nomads' twenty-five line there was quite a marsh. Nothing seemed to be happening, the Nomads were half-asleep, the Army threes could not hold their passes. "Come on, Nomads!" a red-faced man below me yelled, all by himself and with marked impatience. A burble or "Bedfords!" answered him from the other side. The referee blew his whistle.

Bored and disappointed, I squeezed along to the gangway and went in search of physical relief. At the top of the steps, as I was returning, I heard a voice say "John, of all people!" I turned round and saw Mabel.

"Why 'of all people'?" I asked. "Did you think I was in prison or something?"

"You're looking frightfully fit," she said, running her eye over me.

"And you, horribly fit."

She was wearing the clothes in which I always picture her, a small, closely-fitting brown hat, a blue scarf sailor-knotted, a leather coat and a brown tweed skirt joined by ribbed stockings to tiny brogues. A neat, self-contained person, who drove a huge Humber very skilfully. An organizing spinster, you would have said; but her life was centred about a frail, freckled, charming little daughter.

"Charles is here," she said, "and Ronald."

"And Dorothy?"

"No, not Dorothy."

"Thank God!" I said, but silently.

Then I noticed Desmond just behind her, as one notices an elephant behind an antelope. He had, I suppose, been waiting for me with his huge smile of greeting for fully half a minute.

I said: "Hullo, Desmond!"

He said: "Fine, thanks!"

"How's agriculture?"

"Cruel."

"What have you done with Charles?" I asked them.

I was nervous. If there was to be a meeting I wanted to have it planned in detail.

"He saw someone he knew farther down. He's somewhere down there."

"I'll find him, and come back," I said.

The gangway was crowded with jostling men. I struggled down as far as row eighteen, the second behind my own. It was fairly empty. I looked round but could see no sign of Charles; nor of Klaus and Lanair, for men were standing in the row between. When I caught sight of Klaus's hat there was a man standing between him and Lanair. A big, broad-shouldered man, with a soft clerical hat. I would have recognized those shoulders from the gallery at a church conference. I pushed past a horsey person and climbed over the seats in front. As I squeezed towards Klaus I heard him say:

"Yes, Father."

Charles caught sight of me then, and nearly toppled backwards in his excitement. He said words like "old man" and "splendid," and then: "I saw Major Lanair. I recognized him. He played for us that day—you remember?"

"Why aren't you ministering to your diocese?" I asked.

They were the only words I could think of.

His face clouded. I could almost believe that I saw tears in his eyes.

"Terrible!" he said.

"You mean——?"

"They're not trying. They're not working together. They can't do a single thing right. I've never in my life seen such——"

"By the way——" I said, turning towards Klaus.

"Your friend introduced us. Awfully glad——"

Klaus said: "Father Saggard has explained the football-playing to me."

I thought there was a ghost of a smile on his lips.

"And compared with your explanation——" Lanair began.

"But this isn't football, John, it's just like a lot of old maids at croquet. I've never seen such stuff. Look here, there are three seats empty where I am, I've got Mabel and Desmond up there, come along and join us. Quick, they'll be starting again in two ticks."

The preliminary whistle went at that moment. In a blaze of unpopularity we fought our way up to Charles's row, Lanair leading, myself in the rear. Charles, as he forced himself through to the gangway, was talking to Klaus over his shoulder, as naturally as if they had been old friends.

"The ball's—too sticky to hold now—at their feet—only way then is to drop on it. . . ."

We reached Mabel and Desmond just as a roar behind told us that the game had re-started. Charles, as if awakened by the last trump, stopped dead and swung round to face the field. Across his sturdy body I made a pretence of introducing the parties in the new English manner (" . . . sister . . . Major Lanair . . . brother-in-law"). Squeezed between myself and Desmond, Ronald was discovered.

He said: "How are you, Uncle John?"

"Hullo, Ronald! Why aren't you at school?"

"Measles."

"You've got measles?"

"No, but a lot of fellows have. They had to shut up shop."

"Lucky fellow!"

"Yes."

But having done his duty he was not much interested in me. He leaned across Desmond.

"Father, which is Robertson? Is he the one with the scrum-cap?"

"What? I don't know. Don't talk now, old chap. NOMADS!"

Mabel, sitting on my right, asked:

"How's Peggy?"

"Oh, very fit."

"Why didn't you bring her?"

"I—she——"

They were stirring at last. One of the Nomads, a tall fellow, had it in the line out, whisked it back to fly-half, who cut through by himself and was running straight. He passed inside just as he was tackled, the centre three groped and got hold of it somehow. They were running. It went across to the right, they made another ten yards, and then the movement collapsed in a scrimmage. But they were in the Regiment's twenty-five.

"She's opening something," I told Mabel.

"A bottle?"

"Yes—I don't know."

The Regiment was looking less happy. They were slithering badly, they were top-heavy. Charles was shouting between his cupped hands "Hustle, Nomads! Hustle, hustle, hustle!" They were hustling, but ineffectively. In the new position they did not know what to do with their advantage. They were grabbing the slippery ball, tossing it back uncertainly, making five yards and falling. Yet they held their ground, that was something. Charles changed places with his son, so as to be next to me. In a moment of respite, when the scrum had gone askew and the halves were pushing it round like railwaymen a turntable, he said: "It's no good, they can't hold it. Their only hope is to charge it over." The ball came out, the Regiment scrum-half was too far forward, scrum again. The tension was relaxing.

"I wanted you to meet Klaus," I said, "he's——"

He gripped my arm.

"Idiots!"

The Nomad scrum had broken in the middle, like double doors staved open, and half the men were lying in the mud. There was a yell of "Bedford!" and four soldiers, running as if yoked together, were charging forward with the ball lolloping two yards in front of their feet. They dropped into a wedge, two in front and two lying close at their heels. They ran as straight as a train. By luck or by cunning they kept the ball close. They were past the half-way line already, and the Nomads were scurrying after them like girls in a paperchase. I heard, cutting through the babel, Charles's agonized voice, "Drop on it!" There was no one to drop.

I heard Lanair: "Come on, the blinkin' army!"

But as if in answer to Charles's prayer a little woolly-headed Nomad had appeared from nowhere, was level with the charging wedge, was overtaking it. I had a vision of little brown legs scissoring madly, I saw him swerve in. The roar came first. He curled up on the ground with the ball hugged to his stomach, the forward toppled over him. Like one possessed, Charles was yelling "Get round!" and already there were twenty men scrapping in a knot, the ball lost among them. I saw the referee put the whistle to his lips, but before he had blown it the tumbling mass had heaved, loosened and the same little man who had made himself the kernel of all the fury twisted out, the ball in front of him. He took it at his feet half a dozen yards, picked it up, and ran like a greyhound. When a forward pulled him down he had recovered over twenty yards. The stands were shaking.

Charles stopped yelling for a moment to tell me: "Young Bannister. Trial cap."

It was in touch now, the Regiment's ball. The Nomads had it, it came to the centre three, and with a magnificent cross-kick he found touch well up on the other side. It was in again almost before I could see what had happened. A Nomad had it again, ran a few yards and punted forward. As the ball rose I saw Bannister running. The Regiment back tried to catch it, dropped it. It rolled a little way, Bannister kicked forward, and dropped on it as it trickled over the line. We hardly realized that a try had been scored.

Mabel said in my ear: "Charles will preach a wonderful sermon next Sunday. All about collaring Sin low and making a drop-kick over the goal of Purity."

The ball rose ponderously, spitting lumps of mud and turning over like a waisted flour-sack. To our amazement it fell just beyond the bar.

"Not long to go," Charles said, and I was amazed to see that he was right.

Desmond said: "They're showing some fight now. They're making the soldiers look out for themselves. They'll do it yet, maybe."

The clouds had piled up and sunk lower. The light was failing, and it was getting very chilly. I asked Mabel if she were warm enough. "Yes thanks, John." I glanced along the row and saw Klaus gravely conversing with Ronald.

It was soccer after that. "They're enjoying 'emselves, those boys," Desmond said. To us, straining our eyes to see where the ball was, it was a restless confusion. The play was in the Regiment's

half. Occasionally we saw the ball rise out of the *mêlée* and curve down towards the Nomads' goal, but the back was there for it, and if he failed to pick it up the Nomad forwards, appearing out of the mist, were round him before the Regiment were upon it. Caked with mud, moving clumsily, they locked themselves into a rough testudo, dug in their heels, thrust their way through the gathering army grovel, and drove the ball back to the twenty-five, where we could see nothing but a stormy sea of brown bodies, the waves breaking and forming and breaking again.

I moved along to be next to Klaus, and asked him: "Bored?" He was intent on the game, and I did not catch his reply, but presently he said, without turning his head: "It is impossible, how they are still running."

They were running faster now. They were conscious that only a few minutes were left, they could work themselves right out without having to fight the instinct for saving. The Nomads were mad to score. Blurred as the field was, I could see the pace quickening. A man with blood all over his face had got the ball and was running blindly at the Regiment goal-line. He was stopped by a wall that had flung itself together, and as it toppled to submerge him he was surrounded by his own men. The whistle blew, a scrum formed instantly, ragged but good enough. The soldiers wheeled, the half yelled "Break left, Regiment!" They broke, stumbled forward and gathered speed. The ball ran from them, a three-quarter swooped on it, gathered it, twisted and swerved round them. He passed wildly. The wing tried to grab it and fell full-length in the mud as it rolled into touch. It was in again, before the shouting had dwindled. I lost it once more, and could see nothing but the men running, a furious activity that had no centre. I glanced at my watch. There was time yet. On the far side and near the Regiment goal a new roar began, and suddenly the soldiers were running in a line, four of them, the rest hard on their heels. One of them had got it, I couldn't see which. God! the pace of them over that mud. I saw the swing of a man's arms and then, as someone leapt on his shoulders, the ball flying like a bullet. The man on his left took it, held it somehow, there were four in the line again and it was level with my seat, their pace unchecked. The ball came back towards me, the right wing swerved in but failed to hold it. They were dribbling now, still running at the same amazing speed, they were over the twenty-five. A loose kick lifted the ball, and once again the Nomad back was ready to receive it. Like headed deer the whole pack checked, swung round, and raced towards their own goal-line. Charles had forgotten his cloth altogether and was shriek-

ing unmentionable words, Desmond was booming in chorus, Lanair was bellowing "On to him, you lousy b——s, get hold of him, sit on him!" but their voices were drowned by the tempest of twenty thousand others. I felt Klaus grip my arm. I saw one man threading his way through the moving tangle, moving at a speed by which the rest were ambling. I saw him hand-off a figure that shot towards him, swerve, punt, and catch the ball again. He was clear now, running in a slant towards the flag. For a second I thought there was nothing to stop him, that the Nomads had the game. But someone was running across, curving up behind him. The Nomad's speed slackened just a trifle, he was running windless, and the Regiment forward was gaining. We leaned over like corn in the wind, we were too hoarse to yell any more. The Nomad had five yards to run, he had quickened as the forward came within a foot of him. He was grazing the touch-line, trying frantically to swing his weight enough to bring him inside the flag. My breath seemed to stop and my body to grow rigid. The soldier hurled himself forward, throwing out his arms. I thought he had missed. But he got him. The two men rolled together, over and over, and landed in the midst of the ambulance equipment. The ball, washing its hands of the excitement, ambled away into the arms of an elderly photographer. No side.

I think that we shouted as long and loudly as the Regiment's supporters, who were mostly on the other side of the ground. I know that the roar lasted so long that I was deafened by it for ten minutes afterwards; that it was echoing back and forth as we jostled our way up the gangway, and that it followed us through the tunnel as we went down on the other side. We had lost, but in the rare exhilaration made by that breathless moment it did not matter. We had seen a miracle, and we were still uplifted above reality. We were transported, the twenty thousand of us, by that golden illusion that a perfect tackle on the line was the only act worth performing, the only vision worth living to see. We uttered little oaths, hoarsely, not daring to raise our voices when we spoke of a thing so rare and wonderful. We were united, as men who have passed together through some experience too holy to be related.

It could not last, that exaltation which two vigorous young men had produced in us. Already, as we came out into the yard, men were discussing the first of the Regiment's tries and reminding each other how, at Twickenham in 1910, Stephen Wallace. . . . Charles had me by the arm, and he was saying something about Tenterford being starved, not getting a chance. He might have taken me home to the vicarage without realizing that any of his belongings were

missing, but Mabel fastened upon him and rounded up the party. Ronald—as always—had strayed. We found him in conversation with a school friend—they were discussing the discipline of the house—and we moved in a body to the car-park. I found Klaus at my elbow and asked him if he had enjoyed himself. He looked very solemn, like a child who has been taken by artless parents to see Othello. “There was so much courage,” he said, “and I was carried beyond myself by the shouting.” I was satisfied. He was shaping.

At the gate we were crushed by the hurrying crowd, but we bore it cheerfully, making good-humoured and witless remarks to the strangers pressed against us. It was rapidly growing dark, the distant view was in monochrome, and the air was full of the sweet smell of strong tobacco. We were a company of squires and labourers. All round were faces that we liked and some that we knew. We murmured “What a tackle! Do come round some time!” and were suddenly forced apart, so that we forgot whom we had seen and were conscious only of an added cheerfulness.

Mabel said, when we reached the car-park: “We must all have tea somewhere,” and I suggested Barton, which was approximately on our way and where any tea place would be less crowded than those in Shefford. To Barton I drove, over a bad road, Charles following in his Morris. We found the place I had faintly remembered, a bun-shop called The Kettle on the Hob which proclaimed itself a Good Pull-In for Motors and which, as I now recalled, provided delicious home-made bread.

The proprietress, a lively old harridan with a pure Birmingham accent, said that she never expected parties on a Thursday, not that size of party nohow, but Lanair overrode her objections.

“Are you really Mrs. Smith?” he asked. (The name was plain for all to see upon the fascia-board.) “Then I knew your grandfather when he was mayor of Calais. You must have one of those cream buns on me.”

A little bewildered, she pushed four of her bijou tables together and spread a cloth. We arranged our chairs.

Desmond whispered in my ear: “I’m paying for this, old man. Yes, sure.”

We made Ronald pay youth’s penalty by acting as errand-boy for Mrs. Smith, whose supplies of bread and milk were insufficient; and Lanair appointed himself waiter, bringing cups and plates in both hands and under both arms, while we sorted and arranged them.

We heard him in serious conversation with our hostess behind the screen which cut off the less presentable portion of the shop parlour, and I learned a good deal from both about the many ways of curing chilblains.

"I don't know why it is," Charles said, "but Service teams are the only ones that seem able to get going right off the mark. We were very lucky not to have our line crossed five or six times in the first half instead of only twice. Well, I can only hope the shaking-up has taught those fellows something. If they'd only settled down in the first five minutes——"

"But Charles, dear, you didn't settle down, not even in the last five. You started by trying to stop the ball with your right foot and planting it on my left——"

"It comes to this," Charles said, ignoring her, "if you don't get your second wind in the first three minutes——"

Desmond, the soul of politeness, was registering attention, and I felt that I should not be missed. Ronald had squeezed himself in on my right, unobtrusively. He was rather an undersized boy, and most of his actions were unobtrusive, though in other respects I thought his manners a little below average. In appearance he was rather like my mother, and except for a shy way of turning his head when someone spoke to him, without allowing his eyes to meet the questioner's directly, he seemed to have nothing of a Saggard in him. I asked him:

"And how's Pollen these days? Are you still messing together?"

"Pollen? Oh yes, he's all right. Did I show you what he wrote in the *Phoenix* last term? It was awfully enterprising. They say his stuff is awfully reminiscent of Flecker."

"Who does?" I inquired, with some curiosity.

"Oh, Meldrake and—Meldrake was frightfully enthusiastic."

He started work on his bread and jam, and I thought I should get no more out of him. But he struck up again of his own accord.

"Pollen was beaten last term."

"Oh, who by?"

"Games Committee. Cutting P.T. He got six, which I thought was rather enterprising, but one was for side. They said if he didn't do P.T. he'd get a warped body, and he said, 'Well, Pope had a warped body.' They didn't know who Pope was—at least, Pollen said they didn't. He says they said 'Which Pope?' and he said 'I thought you'd know,' or something like that, so they chucked in an extra cut at once. It was very well done, Pollen showed me the cuts. It was practically a one-inch group."

Mabel, who had been listening, sought enlightenment upon this

technicality. As Mrs. Smith was on the scene with a relay of scones I changed the subject:

"Have you been played in the Colts yet?" I asked.

"Yes, twice. Then I got scrum-disease."

"It's a good game," I said.

"Very enterprising," he admitted. Then he whispered: "Is that fellow English? He isn't, is he? He looks English, but he talks rather biff-eyed."

I said: "No, German. An awfully good sort."

"He seems to know a lot."

"What about?"

"Engines, and Goethe. I've never read any Goethe."

"No?"

"Never get time."

On my left, Klaus was absorbed by Desmond, who in his beautiful low voice, with broad gestures of his strong hands and many unrelated smiles, was explaining the action of the McCormick Daisy Reaper. Mabel, I could see, was anxious lest Klaus should be bored. For my own part I would have listened to Desmond for hour after hour, even had he been comparing the subsoil of Peru with that of Munster, for the simple pleasure that his voice gave me and to watch the light in his soft brown eyes. He was looking his best now, in rough brown tweeds, a grey knitted waistcoat and a spotted tie, his face a little reddened by the hot tea, his curly hair, greying a little, clipped short at the sides and unusually tidy. I was not surprised that Klaus responded so well to his friendliness.

"Is your cup empty, Major Lanair? I can't see. Ronald, look, will you? Do have some more. It's thirsty work listening to Charles." Mabel turned to me. "Have you heard that Charles has been offered a diocese?"

Charles broke off in the middle of a diatribe on the new training methods.

"Mabel, really! You know perfectly well that it's not official yet."

"No, but everyone knows."

"Everyone soon will——"

"I asked you how your diocese was," I said. "Don't you remember, directly I saw you?"

"I can't say I do——"

Charles was a little vexed. I guessed that he had intended to stage a more solemn scene for bursting the news upon me. It occurred to me, then, that I had not shown an appropriate measure of astonishment. It was not altogether a surprise—I had friends in

the Athenæum, and the most select of gossip-houses are not water-tight. I said hastily:

"But I'm awfully pleased, Charles. Which one is it, London or Truro?"

At "Truro" he grinned.

"Some place in the South Seas," Mabel told me.

"No rugger there," I said.

"No, but plenty of cricket. But I don't know if I'll take it. I haven't decided yet. I don't want anything said about it."

Ronald piped up.

"But I think we should, Father. I think it would be frightfully enterprising."

Charles gave him a quelling look.

"Uncle John's got nothing to eat," he said. "Wake up, old man, pass something."

"Do you think that Charles would ever look the part?" Mabel asked me.

I said sternly: "Mabel, I will not have flippancy over a sacred subject."

"You mean Charles?"

I engaged Ronald in conversation while her husband subdued her. Lanair helped me.

"Have I told you," he asked Ronald, "the story about how your uncle lost his trousers in the main street of Lille?"

"Not that one, Lanair," I said.

Lanair broke an éclair in half, put one piece on Ronald's plate and one on his own.

"I'll tell you some time when the old goat's out of the way," he said.

I heard Desmond say: "Very bad for Ronald!" but Mabel was still laughing.

Lanair called: "Mrs. Belvoir-Cholmondley! Are you there? Have you any more of these squashy buns?"

Charles addressed me across the table.

"There's been a lot in the papers lately about the effect of the war on mentality. There was an article in the *Chronicle*, it was saying that it was really extraordinary how the minds of some of those fellows were unhinged. I can't remember the figures they gave, but it was most remarkable, it made terrible reading. One doesn't realize, I think——"

Lanair had been listening intently.

"In my case," he said, "the war really had nothing to do with it. I was born like this."

Reddening, Charles said: "My dear Major, I really wasn't alluding——"

Mabel helped him. "He meant John," she said. "He doesn't remember what John was like before he went soldiering."

"I do," said Lanair. "I personally think he's half-a-length saner than he used to be."

"I always wonder," Charles pursued, "how far one can rely on the figures they give in the papers. It seems to me so extraordinary that——"

"It depends rather on which paper and what figures," Mabel suggested. "The date at the top is nearly always right, the circulation figure we have no means of checking——"

Desmond said: "Drink up your tea, woman, before it gets cold."

She drank it at a gulp.

"Do you read the papers?" she asked Klaus.

Lanair, in a low voice, was recounting to Ronald the deplorable episode connected with the entry into Lille.

"I have read them sometimes," Klaus answered, "but I do not greatly care for that writing."

"*The Times* is really the best on sport," Charles said, "and on church affairs too, for that matter. Of course, the *Record*——"

"But it's poor on Mormonism and home-cookery," Mabel interrupted.

"And what kind of papers do you have in Germany?" Charles asked.

I answered for Klaus: "Oh, the German press is very mixed, like ours, there's——" but Klaus made his own reply.

"I have not read them much. I have been away for a long time. I was too young to read the newspapers. We had no papers at the Abbey, only books."

"The Abbey?" Charles queried.

"Yes, Father, at the Abbey we——"

"That was Klaus's school," I said.

Ronald, recovering from Lanair's story, asked suddenly: "Were you at school at an Abbey, Gotthold?"

"Yes."

"Was it like Downside, that sort of place?"

Mabel, seeing my face, said:

"Ronald, you surely haven't stopped eating! Go on, take some more cake, give Major Lanair something."

And Charles, awaking with his usual start to parental duty, added: "Manners, old man! You must remember to pass things."

"Thanks, but I'm étouffé jusqu'aux dents" Lanair murmured politely.

Under cover of senior conversation Ronald returned to the point at issue, rocking back his chair and speaking behind me.

"I'm told that German schools aren't frightfully good?" he said, with professional interest.

Klaus was surprised.

"I beg your pardon? I do not quite understand."

"I mean, I've been told that they're run rather more like our secondary schools."

"Secondary schools?"

"Yes, that's the sort of lower class of English school. I don't mean——"

"You mean that German schools are low-class?"

"No, not exactly that. Of course I know that they teach you frightfully well there, my history man says——"

I became aware of what was going on just as Klaus, growing uncannily white, said loudly: "In German schools they do not teach boys to be rude to a foreigner. We learn that——"

He had pushed back his chair and was actually rising to his feet. Desmond caught him by the arm.

"Could you let me have a match, Mr. Gotthold? I used up all mine trying to get my pipe alight in the stadium——"

"He didn't mean to be rude," I whispered, "he's so frightfully proud of his own school that——"

Desmond had somehow slipped a cigarette between Klaus's lips, and Klaus was calming.

Charles said, very calmly and sensibly:

"Ronald, you must apologize."

But Mabel, acting the most rapidly, had already moved round to Ronald's chair and on some pretext, in less time than I should have thought possible, had got him out into the street.

When Ronald came back he said, as he passed Klaus's chair: "I'm sorry." Curtly, but not impolitely. Klaus gave a little bow, and it was over. But they were too shy to speak to each other again.

Lanair, resuming his duties, cleared away the tea-things with Mrs. Smith's and Ronald's help. And for some time we sat smoking, too warm and too well satisfied with the afternoon's exertions to be troubled by the slightly musty odour which pervaded the establishment. Our talk, slow and intermittent, drifted back to the game. Charles must have been suffering the birth-pangs of a sermon, for he was content to let Mabel and Desmond do the talking while he

puffed serenely at his huge briar, his eyes benevolently encircling but never fixing us.

When at last we stirred, reluctant as early-risers in mid-winter, our hostess had disappeared in the further reaches of her domain. I sent Klaus to start up the Vauxhall, and Mabel followed with Ronald and Lanair. Desmond lingered to do the paying, Charles and I to prevent him. Together we succeeded in dismissing Desmond. Sounds came from somewhere in the private premises, but our calls brought no Mrs. Smith. Charles re-lighted his pipe and sat down.

I said:

"I'm awfully glad about the Bishopric, old man. Honestly I've not heard better news for ages. You do deserve it."

"I'm not sure," he said.

"Of course you do——"

"I mean, I'm not sure if I shall take it."

"I know there's the expense," I said cautiously, "the Seal and Induction and so forth. I could quite easily help a bit——"

"It's not that. I mean, I'm awfully grateful but—you see, I don't quite like the idea of someone else at St. John's. I don't mean to be conceited—I know I'm a dud preacher and all that, and I always say the wrong things at meetings—but I do know those people, I know exactly how they live and all about them. They're used to me, and they worship Dorothy. I don't think they'd get the same kick out of grumbling at a new man—I don't know. I mean, it takes time. And they like the sort of service I run, no fal-lals—I don't mean I'm narrow, but people like what they're used to."

The horns of our cars sounded in chorus, but he did not seem to hear them. Ronald came with a polite inquiry, and was sent away.

"And there's the lads. They want handling, you know." There was a suggestion of pleading in his tone, as if I were trying to drag him away. "I rounded 'em up when I first went, and got the club going, and I've not lost many. There's not one of 'em's been in court for the last two years. And I can put out two soccer elevens now who'd give a game to any boys of the same age."

A small girl had come into the shop for a brown loaf. In obedience to some instinct like that which causes the migration of birds at the appropriate season, Mrs. Smith appeared, effected the transaction, gave us a glance, and would have gone away again. We stopped her and asked for our bill.

"Oh, but the queer gentleman paid," she said.

I rose and buttoned the collar of my overcoat. But Charles sat

still, fingering an Idris ashtray; his eyes, now rather gloomy, on the ornamental back of a chair.

He said awkwardly: "Of course, it's rather—stiff for you. I mean, Ronald's school-fees, the extras seem to be higher every term. I've tried——"

I could see the connection in his thoughts.

"It's a pure accident," I said (I was weary of saying it) "that you have the offspring and I the boodle. If there were any justice in this world you'd have been born first."

He was not listening. I did not blame him—we had argued this out so often and the topic was even more trying for him than for me. I knew so well the pace of his mind—which was rather like scout's pace, twenty walking and twenty running—that I almost expected his next words:

"This young Gotthold—have you adopted him or——?"

"I'm looking after him for a friend," I said.

He got up at last and began to walk towards the door, but never before had human legs compassed six yards so slowly.

"I'm sorry Ronald was rude," he said. "I didn't quite see what happened. If—"

'He wasn't, he only——'

"I like the lad. He's got nice eyes. D'you know, it's queer, he reminds me awfully of someone, I can't think who. I know the face, but I simply——"

"I can tell you," I said, "he's the image of that man who was in the hotel with us at Lucerne—what was his name?—Archer."

"Perhaps that's it."

"I'm sorry," I called to Mabel. She was in the back of the Morris, swathed in rugs, and the side-screen protected us from the full force of her sarcasm. Lanair was seated on the kerb. "Charles got a bone in his throat," I shouted. "I tried to get it out with a teaspoon, and then the teaspoon got stuck, and Mrs. Smith and I had to get hold of it with the coal-tongs."

"We got talking," Charles added.

We arranged an early reunion, but the prospect did little to curtail the formalities of leave-taking. Mabel opened the door to give me her sisterly salute, and proceeded in a scurry of words to barter family gossip. When both parties were at last fixed in their cars Charles suddenly got out again and came back to speak to Klaus.

"I meant to say—you must stay with us some time. My wife would be ever so pleased. You must come sometime."

Then he turned to me:

"I say, John——"

"Yes?"

"Do you think——" He doubled his hand and rubbed his temple. "There was something I wanted to say, I've forgotten."

"About that last try?"

His son was already showing impatience by vigorous blasts on the horn.

"No. Well—I may remember when I next see you. 'Bye old boy."

We followed the Morris as far as the Griffin crossroads, where it turned to the left.

Klaus said: "He is very kind, Father Saggard. He gave me a little present."

"He's one of the best," I said.

But I was conscious of a strange emotion. I did not want Klaus to stay with him. I did not want him to like Klaus too much. Klaus belonged—but I could not tell whom he belonged to.

The sky ahead was lighted by a tremendous beam, and when we reached the crest of the hill it was focussed full upon us, blinding us. I slowed down to a walking pace and edged along by the verge till the monster was safely past. At any rate, I thought, Heinrich (I heard his low voice, saw his smile) was on my side.

We passed through Luton, quiet with the shops closed, and forked right on to the Flamstead road.

"You're certain you know the way?" I asked Lanair.

"I have bowled a hoop along this road," he said sleepily. "Keep on turning right, and when you can't turn right turn left. Then you'll see 'Tillinglade, Beware of the Major-General' on a sign-post."

"All right," I said, "since you know the way so well you'd better drive."

"I'm much more useful navigating," he protested.

I stopped the car and unwrapped him.

"You drive," I repeated, preparing for sleep.

"I think you're damned uncivil," he said, as he climbed into the driving seat. "Where do you keep the clutch on this Aunt Jemima?"

With the night air in her carburettor the car had been running very sweetly, but she seemed at once to show resentment at feeling a new hand on the reins. At first there was no unusual noise, though I listened intently for it, only a sensation that the engine was pulling feebly. Presently a knock was audible.

"Something wrong, isn't there, Klaus?"

"Yes."

We came out on to a better road and Lanair turned right. The noise increased, and I would have said that we were missing on one cylinder.

"You'd better stop," I said.

"No!" Klaus said quickly. "If it stops it may not start again. Wait till we are near a repair shop."

"Are we near a town of any size?" I asked Lanair. "I'm right off my bearings."

"How should I know?"

"But you said you——"

"I'm not navigating. I can't drive and navigate."

He took his foot off the accelerator, awaiting instructions.

"Go on!" Klaus shouted.

We were limping badly now. At every hundred yards the engine seemed to cease firing altogether and we held our breath until it spluttered into action again like a drowning man making his last struggle. The noise was hideous.

"What's wrong?" I asked Klaus.

He said something about piston-rings, but was not certain.

"Don't de-clutch!" he called to Lanair. "Keep going. Careful. Not too much gas."

The road lay straight and bare before us. Lanair began to blow his horn.

"Must you do that?" I shouted. "We're making enough noise without that."

"Noise? What noise?"

"The noise of the engine, you fool."

"It's not making more noise than usual, is it?"

"Go on!" Klaus shouted desperately. "It will stop if you do not go on."

"The boy's inspired!"

We had come to cottages at last, and my heart leapt when I saw a sign "Dayning Charlfort, $\frac{3}{4}$ milc." We were on a down gradient, going at a nice twenty miles an hour, with a noise like a field-battery on Flemish roads; and in this indecent manner we arrived at the outskirts of the town. Our impetus took us to the summit of the humped railway-bridge, where the engine faded. It came to life again at the bottom of the short gradient, and with the energy of its death pangs carried us fifty yards up the rising High Street. Opposite, plumb opposite the entrance to the Victoria Service Garage it breathed its last.

Lanair pulled on the hand-brake.

"There's driving for you!" he said.

Klaus jumped out and lifted the bonnet. Lanair and I followed more slowly and stood miserably behind him while he flashed the inspection lamp and poked about the machinery. His examination did not last long, however. With his head still lost among the valves and tappets he sent back a message to headquarters. It was unintelligible.

"Is it a big job?" we asked him.

"It will take a long time," he replied.

We found a mechanic hovering on our outskirts.

"Have you got a man who can fit a new thingummy?" Lanair asked.

"Pardon, sir?"

"Good! How long will it take him?"

I brought the mechanic into communication with Klaus, and they discussed the matter. Lanair and I lighted up and watched them dumbly, like tourists in an art gallery. The mechanic, when Klaus had repeated his diagnosis five times over, proceeded to peer and poke on his own account, while Klaus scornfully watched him. Then they went into committee again. It was ascertained, at length, that the job could not be done that night.

There was, a little farther up the street, a hotel of three-star rank called the Angel, and we repaired there to consider our next move with the help of whisky-and-soda.

"It's lucky," I said, "that we're not stranded miles from anywhere."

Lanair agreed.

"We might," he said, "have been in an aeroplane instead of a car, and we might have been flying over a jungle, and we might have crashed in flames in the very middle of a herd of tigers particularly hostile to men whose names began with the letters G, S, or L. I grant," he added, "that driving in your machine is hardly a more beetle-brained kind of enterprise."

There was a two-inch map of the neighbourhood in the smoking-lounge, and Lanair studied it while I got to work on a Bradshaw.

"We can get a train to Luton," I said presently, "at ten——"

"We've been to Luton already, I'm tired of Luton——"

"——at ten-fifteen, and change there. Then there's a train from Luton—no, not Thursday—yes, there's one at eleven twenty-seven, which gets in at twelve forty-three, which would get us home about half-past one. Or we could go to Cheddington——"

Lanair looked up with a smile.

"You remember when we came out on the main road?" he said, "well, if we'd turned left there instead of right we'd have arrived within about fifty yards of Minifie's house. It shows there's nothing wrong with my sense of distance."

"Is Minifie expecting you?" I asked.

For the moment I had forgotten all about him.

"No, I meant to send him a postcard, I forgot."

"The immediate question, then, is: what do we do next?"

"We order more whisky."

We decided, at length, to stay for the night where we were. Klaus said that if the garage could not get the job done before ten o'clock he would borrow their tools and do it himself. If we left just before ten we should be in town by about 11.30.

"Good enough," Lanair agreed. "Klaus, old man, I've got cramp and can't move, do be mother's own dear boy and go forth and buy toothbrushes."

"He can't," I said, "the shops are all closed."

"You can always make a chemist open. Say that you want three toothbrushes for three sick children. And you might call at the local laundry and say that the nightgown which was not claimed last week belongs to me."

"And on your way back," I added, "see if you can hire a bicycle for Lanair to go over and see General Minifie after dinner."

"Minifie be damned! We'll call on our way back to-morrow."

I engaged rooms and telephoned to Peggy. Returning to the lounge I found that we no longer had it to ourselves. Near the fire an old lady in rather short skirts was sitting with a girl who was obviously her daughter and a youth who, from the way the old lady treated him, I took to be the girl's fiancé; a young man with a high forehead which somehow gave no impression of intellectual power, and the middle part of a fair moustache dabbed on beneath the nostrils; a climber, trying to make the best of his unhappy position by bravado. He was talking in a thin nasal voice about the territorial unit of which he was evidently an officer; and about military affairs generally, causing Lanair, whose back was towards him, to go through the whole gamut of his grimaces. I wondered if the girl was worth the youth's discomfort. She was half a head taller than he, coldly pretty, and I thought there was a mercenary look about her. But her bare arms were lovely, and I was surprised, when she spoke, by the delicacy of her voice.

They were in full evening dress, which I thought curious in a small country hotel. But soon after I caught sight of others similarly attired, and learned, from shreds of conversation, that there was a

dance that evening in the Corn Exchange across the street. The county, or a few square miles of it, was drifting towards Charlfort, and one or two cars had come out from town.

"I wish I had my tuxedo," Lanair said. "I'd flap a leg. There doesn't seem to be very much to do in this city. I see no opera-house, there is no carnival procession, the streets are not gay with bunting and joyous laughter."

"Can you dance?" I asked. "I've never seen you."

"I could try."

I saw his eye straying to the young woman by the fire. He could not resist feminine evening clothes.

"And you, Klaus, would you like to dance?"

"If a suitable lady would dance-partner me," he said demurely.

"Who, for instance?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

In a corner near the door a grey, wasted man sprawled on a sofa, his hands behind his head, his eyes listless. At short intervals his face twitched, assuming a hideous expression. When it relaxed again he was not bad-looking, only inert, vacant, as if a house had been well built and then left unoccupied, to fall slowly into ruin. I thought, when I first saw him, that the face was familiar; and as his eyes met mine there was a spark of recognition in them. He moved his legs as if to rise, and then sank back again. We had both been mistaken. With English awkwardness we avoided looking at one another after that, but spied upon each other covertly. And each time I stole a glance in his direction I saw that horrible twitch, which repelled and fascinated me.

Klaus was deep in the *Autocar*, and Lanair, gazing into his empty glass, was talking steadily in a low voice.

". . . objection is that it's done so easily. You may think I'm an old woman, John, but it frightens me. You get a few thousand people together, and perform certain antics in front of them, and they'll roar and clap and even tear each other. I tell you, I've seen Maori dances, and I've seen a cup-final, and upon my soul there was precious little difference in the emotions. What it comes to is this: if any one of the big popular rags were to say, 'Dogs are the chief disease-carriers—down with dogs!' and go on saying it for a week, then there'll be a great national anti-dog movement. It'll be the patriotic thing to abolish dogs. Then you've only got to get up a monster procession with a few brass bands and blue banners, shouting 'The dogs must go!' and you'll find nice old ladies shooting the Pomeranians they've been devoted to for years. And if I keep my Sealyham locked up in the attic and smuggle food in to him, my

housekeeper'll give me away, and I stand a pretty good chance of being lynched in the street. That'll be about a week after an appearance of a letter in *The Times*, signed by all the best known scientists in the country, saying that the disease-carrying theory's bilge. That's how these things go. You take the war——"

I trod on his toe and glanced towards Klaus. That topic was still out of bounds in Klaus's presence.

He murmured: "Sorry, forgot!" Then, "Klaus, old man, if you've done with that number you're reading, I've got a jolly one for you here. It's August, 1906. There's a very keen article on 'The Gudgeon Pin, its Relation to the Cog-wheel and its Attitude towards Sex.' D'you think, John, he's old enough to read it?"

A servant came in to make up the fire, which with two giant pine-logs rose to a glorious blaze. But the room was too large for any single fire; it was chilly beyond the inner circle which the festive trio had made with their chairs, and in spite of the side-lamps there was an air of gloom and desolation. More dancers came in; cold in their evening clothes, the women clutching their wraps and shivering. They drank cocktails and tried to make cheerful conversation, the men were dismally facetious, the laughter sounded like bugles blown by novices. The man whose face twitched was still sprawling on the sofa, neither reading nor sleeping, apparently not even gleaning such conversation as was offered to his ears. I think that we all felt his gloomy presence, that it lent something sinister to the ordinary drabness of a public sitting-room. I was glad when a beautiful English waiter, with a round cheerful face over a spotless shirt-front, told us that dinner was ready.

Lanair said:

"Food again! We've done nothing but eat all day."

"You are not hungry?" Klaus asked him. "Very well, then! Uncle John and I will eat the dinner, you will sit at the table and make your jokes. We shall laugh if there is time between the dishes."

"Jokes at meal-time are bad form," said Lanair definitely.

The adult middle-class does not admit hunger, and some minutes passed before the first group moved off to the dining-room.

"I was just thinking," Lanair said as we got up to go, "this meal will probably cost us not less than fifteen shillings, and if your rotten car hadn't broken we could have touched old Minifie for a dinner and got away without paying a sou for it. He gives a good dinner, too."

"At an hour's notice?" I asked.

He hesitated.

"Yes. Always has a larderful of sardines."

"By the way, what have you done with his gun?"

"Jove! I left it in the car. Look here, I'd better get it. One can't leave those things hanging about. It's not licensed, for one thing."

"After dinner," I suggested.

But he was seriously anxious. As a professional soldier he had proper views on firearms.

"I'll get it now," he said. "It won't take two minutes."

Klaus offered to go, and in the end they decided to go together.

"You go and start feeding," Lanair said, "since you think of nothing but your stomach——"

"All right."

As we went out I saw, or felt, that the man on the sofa was again staring at me. He did not follow us.

The dining-room was protected from draught by a long screen just inside the door. I paused there to glance at my hands, a habit never dropped since childhood, and heard, on the other side of the screen, the old lady asking rather querulously:

"But who is this Sir John Saggard?"

The daughter replied, in her charming voice:

"Oh, he's just one of these elderly sentimentalists that London's full of these days. He writes letters to *The Times* about workhouses and Bengal prisons and stray cats. . . ."

My hands, I decided, really did need washing, though I had scrubbed them thoroughly an hour before. I opened the swing-door quietly and stole away to the lavatory.

When I returned the conversation had shifted to the current musical comedies, and I was able without causing embarrassment to make my way to a vacant table. I ordered a good Hock, as an atonement for my car's misdeeds, and sat with my eyes glued on the card, crumbling bread. A tallish man entering the dining-room of a country hotel by himself normally attracts a moment's attention, and I was distinguished by the lack of evening clothes. The ageing spinsters who are part of the equipment of these places were holding me with steady and (I thought) unfriendly eyes. A girl in a mauve frock said something to the man beside her and giggled. I stared at her for a moment, her face reddened, and I was sorry for my rudeness. It was a relief when Lanair and Klaus came in.

"No, not melon," Lanair said. "Soup, buckets of it. It's cold out now. John, you've no idea what an ass you looked when we came in, sitting all by yourself in that disgusting sportive suit. Everyone was staring at you. I must say, though," he added, raising his

voice, "I've never in my life seen such an anæmic-looking lot of merry-makers all herded together. What is this dance? What does it celebrate? Waiter, why are all these people in their evening outfits? Can you hire me out a white tie?"

"I'm glad you came when you did," I said. "I was suffering from a bout of agoraphobia."

"Agra—what? You're not well or something. You generally like being stared at. I never knew a man who's more pleased to get his picture in the papers. And heaven knows, it's a pleasure that comes to you freely. I can't open a paper these days without seeing that photo that was taken when you were just down from Oxford, labelled 'Well-known snail-fancier fined for reckless driving' or 'War hero beats wife.'"

"Get on with your food," I said. "Klaus, lend him a spoon."

"I'm not hungry, I've done nothing but — what is there? Chicken? Good!"

It was a good dinner, and the wine was fair, but I did not enjoy it as much as I should have expected. I was suffering from a slight headache. Perhaps I had had too good a tea, perhaps my appetite, which is at its best after a good run in the car, had suffered correspondingly from the jading experience of being pulled by an unwilling engine. I wanted Peggy. She, transforming that dining-room as she transformed every room with her presence, would have made the clumsily-shaded lights seem soft, the breakdown an amusing adventure. Without her, I was out of temper with my surroundings. The men at the tables around me made me envious, only for the reason that they were with their womenfolk; and concurrently I wondered how they could bear the company of females so insipid; girls with white faces and scarlet lips, girls that looked like boys, and talked and swaggered like boys, like the boys I connected with buff riding-breeches in the Peckwater Quadrangle; lean, avaricious faces. We drank port, but it was bad, and it made me no more cheerful. I wondered if the women were not, after all, more presentable than the men. Looking across to the table by the screen I thought that those people, after all, were the pleasantest in the whole company.

When we left the dining-room we found that the place was full of dancers. In the lounge there was a group which charmed me; an athletic young man whom I took to be an Indian Civilian on leave, and two girls, one of them his sister, who had relied on cold cream for the tuning of their complexions, were beautifully dressed and laughed naturally. They seemed much younger than the rest, more at their ease and less sophisticated. But the prevailing motif was one of loudness. Loud voices talked of motor-cars, of lighting

that had failed, of policemen who had been outwitted. Men of a curious breed, with dissolute eyes and red faces, emptied good whisky into their stomachs without tasting it and pressed out half-smoked cigarettes against the white banisters of the staircase. Through the burr of male voices cut the strident tones of the women of the new aristocracy, talking of more amusing and distinguished functions which they had lately attended or would shortly attend, of highly titled persons, of travel to places which are the special preserve of the mindless. I wished that Klaus had not been with me. I did not want him, just yet, to see these people at such close quarters.

"We'd better clear out," Lanair said as he lit his cigar. "These people are too grand for the likes of us."

We put on our overcoats and went out into the street. The light from the hotel joined the light streaming out from the Corn Exchange, where the doors were flung open now. We caught sight of palms and stewards and bunting. Figures in evening dress passed to and fro along the pathway of light, as if along the path of a garden, so that it seemed a grotesque impertinence when a heavy motor-lorry, hurrying Londonwards, swept across it, forcing its monstrous passage between slim girls who looked as if they had just been unpacked from tissue paper. Against the Municipal Offices, which were set a little way back from the road, some thirty cars were huddled together, and young men were artfully backing their low, slim vehicles into the few spaces that remained. The beams from their headlamps, not yet extinguished, wavered back and forth across the street, intersecting, drawing yellow pools along the walls of the Alms-houses, reminding me oddly of that tremendous night in my boyhood—a confused memory now—when I had been taken to see the Jubilee illuminations at Portsmouth; and from the small engines, raced in reverse gear against grazing clutches, from the shouted exhortations of those who would be helpful, arose a pandemonium loud enough to wake the countryside. But beyond this little Place de l'Opéra the street lay in heavy shadow. The gas lamps, although the black shading had long been rubbed away, were not like the brilliant new lamps of the London suburbs, and few of the shop-keepers here thought it worth while to keep their blinds up and consume gas for the sake of publicity. The town ignored its noisy visitors. And half a mile from the hotel, where the street narrowed at the summit of the rise and began to pitch down, bending dangerously, into open country, there was no sound but that of the church clock striking, our own footsteps on the pavement, and gentle mirth in the bars of public-houses.

"It gives me the hump, this place," Lanair said despondently.

"The hotel gives me the hump," I retorted.

"That's because you're snobbish. You're a bourgeois of a peculiarly priggish type. You . . ."

He was apt, when he had no better occupation, to amuse and warm himself with his own verbosity. I left him to develop his theme, and turned my attention to Klaus. He had been whistling gently, rather maddeningly, and he stopped now to ask me some question about the afternoon's game. I was surprised, for from me the afternoon was now remote, but I collected my thoughts and answered him as best I could. Charles would have done it much better.

"You yourself have played?" he asked suddenly.

I think it was the first time that he had expressed the slightest interest in my past history.

"Yes, before the—a long time ago."

". . . a special form of megalomania," Lanair was saying, "which, derived from puritanism and class-consciousness. . . ."

"And you played in the—what do you call it?—the scrum? Yes?"

"Yes."

"That is where I should play."

"You'd like to play?"

"I think so, yes. But it would be hard to learn."

"You must try."

We were reaching the last houses, and when a car overtook us we could see the road running for a mile, as straight as a poker.

"We'd better turn back," I said.

"You've not much perseverance, have you?" Lanair jeered.

"All right, you go on. Klaus and I can find our way back by ourselves."

"I wouldn't trust you, you're both such perishing dreamers."

"Are we, Klaus?"

"There is little," he said, "that is worth the while to dream."

"What do you dream about, when you do dream?" Lanair asked abruptly.

"Things I do not care about. A Penitence Chamber and a piano factory."

"A piano factory?" Lanair echoed.

"Yes," I said, "a place where they make pianos."

"*On n'apprendra jamais rien comme ça*," he whispered.

But he took my hint and changed the subject.

We fell into silence at the steepest part of the hill. And there, where the road bent round, Klaus slid his hand through my arm.

We said nothing, and did not look at each other. But with Lanair a pace ahead, as he always was, we walked like that linked together till we reached the hotel.

In the Corn Exchange the band had started, and a screen had been drawn across the doorway. The hotel seemed to be almost empty, save for a few men of hearty, pioneer appearance, who were finishing their cigars and ordering more whiskies in the hall. They would probably be there half the evening, while unhappy girls lined the walls of the dance-hall. Lanair stopped a servant to give elaborate instructions about a hot-water bottle; learning, when the man had politely listened to a long speech, that one had been already placed in his bed as a matter of routine. He had the grace to apologize.

"I'm sorry. Here, buy a bun for your wife."

He passed the usual half-crown in his deft way and turned to me.

"That being so, I shall retire at once. Much as I like the sound of your voice, I find that after ten or twelve hours. . . ."

Klaus had disappeared, and I thought he had probably found his way to bed. It would not have been unlike him to go off without a word. I was sorry, for I had hoped, upon new terms, to have a talk with him. But it was better, perhaps. With Peggy out of range I had no self-confidence; I was tired—I might say something foolish, and ground would be lost.

I went to my bedroom to see if the management had found pyjamas for me. They had, a silk pair, of great beauty but insufficient size. They would have to do. I took off my watch and wound it, but decided then that I would have another pipe before turning-in. Downstairs, I found that the men had actually gone, and their place had been taken by the girl I had noticed first of all in the lounge. She was sitting on a hard chair near the window of the reception office, looking acutely miserable. It flashed through my mind that the fiancé had already disgraced himself by some *gaucherie*, and as the upshot of a quarrel had left her. I was sorry for having thought that she looked mercenary.

I said, relying on the grey strands in my hair to cover the impropriety:

"Excuse me, aren't you cold here? It's exceedingly draughty. Why not sit in the lounge?"

"I can't," she answered, in a voice not unfriendly. "There's a man in there like a spider. He keeps looking—I'm really just as comfortable here, thank you. And" (rather haughtily) "my fiancé will be down in a minute."

I bowed and retired into the lounge myself, a little abashed. Probably she had thought me an antique philanderer. But I understood, as I opened the lounge door, what she had meant by the word "spider." He was still there, sprawling on the sofa. Nothing in his attitude was changed. Only, to mark the passage of time, an empty glass stood on a stool beside him. Perhaps I am wrong in using the word "sinister" to describe the impression which that loose, vacant form made upon me; but the colour of that memory is so dark, now, that I cannot dissociate the image of the man, lying there, from the ideas of fear and evil. He was looking—if such drifting of the eyes can be described as looking—towards the ceiling. But as I crossed the room he turned his head and stared at me.

This time he was not content with staring. He let his feet sink to the floor, pushed up his body, and came towards me with uneasy steps, like a man troubled by gout. His lips twisted in a little smile. He said:

"Well, Colonel, I thought I recognized you!"

His voice was a drawl, fluid, without consonants, like the stage parson's voice with a flavouring of inebriation. I had heard something like it in Mayfair. He stuttered slightly. As he spoke, one of the twitches came, and I thought for a moment that he was a tout of the ordinary kind, with a long out-of-luck story that would develop into broader and broader hints. But I remembered instantly that at the first encounter I had seen something familiar in his face. The men I had seen drinking in the hall had not gone off to dance; they were drinking in the lounge now, in their ceremonial clothes, over auction bridge; and I fear that it was their presence which made me behave meanly.

"I'm afraid I don't remember——" I murmured, stooping to pick up a magazine from the centre table.

"I thought not," he replied, unabashed.

I had moved to the nearest chair and sat down. He pulled up another.

"But I knew you all right. I wasn't absolutely cer-certain, but when you went out I asked the girl in the office."

I said: "Ah, yes."

"And she told me."

"Yes?"

"Well, can't you think who I am?"

I wondered if the men at bridge were listening to this uncomfortable duologue. I heard "Two Hearts . . . Pass."

"No. No, I'm afraid I can't."

I had the magazine open, and my eyes were half-way between the pages and the man's face.

"Denfloyd."

In two seconds I remembered—the spring of '17, Acheux. Ronald Denfloyd. Captain Ronald Denfloyd. Turkish cigarettes. Yes, it was the face.

"Yes, I remember now."

But the twitch and the stutter were both new. And surely he had been very young, quite fresh from Rugby; rather charming, dependable.

"Funny, you know, mee-meeting you like this. I saw in the papers. . . ."

Without any encouragement he ran straight on, apparently unaware alike of my aloofness and of his own repulsive affliction. I listened to him, and went so far towards common courtesy as to shut the magazine. I said: "You got hit?" and "At Griseneste, yes?" but little more. He offered me a drink. I refused, but he rang and ordered two whiskies. I had a feeling that the men by the fire were looking at me, but I did not glance up to see. At one point I asked him, in a voice almost rudely casual: "You managing all right these days?" and he replied: "Oh, pretty well. I got my grandmother's brass, just after I was invalided out. Keeps me f-fairly decently." But that was the only sign I gave of any special interest in his affairs, and I marvel to think how long he persevered with me. He must have been then, as he had been before, a phenomenally friendly person; but, though I raked my mind for every detail of young Denfloyd, formed and perfected a picture of him, it only made this man the more a stranger.

". . . and Jenkinson?" he asked, at length. "What became of him in the end? Didn't he go mad or something?"

"Jenkinson?"

"You remember! Red-headed. Used to go ratting round the can-canteens with two kittens and a bull-terrier."

I remembered him perfectly, but something made me say:

"No, I don't remember. I came across so many men——"

"But he was in your ba-battalion. Surely it was Jenkinson who commanded the f-firing party. That boche you caught spying."

"It may have been. My only——"

"What was the name of that chap. H-Heinrich something, wasn't it?"

"I don't know. Look here, what's the time? I don't want to stay up late because——"

"You know, Colonel, if you hadn't c-caught that man and sho-shot him, there'd have been a devil of——"

"If you don't mind, I'd rather not——"

"J-just a minute. I remember the name now. Gotthold. Heinrich Gotthold."

"If you'll excuse me I think I'll get off to bed now. I'm under doctor's orders. I'll see you in the morning probably."

I could avoid that somehow.

"But you're not going to leave your whisky?"

"I'm not supposed to drink whisky. At least, not much. You drink it for me."

One more or less, I fancied, would not make much difference to him.

I got up.

"Good night!"

"Well, s-see you in the morning. Good night, old man."

I turned to go, and saw Klaus sitting near the door, his face hidden by the *Field*. I had no idea how long he had been there, for I had not heard him come in.

Stopping by his chair, I asked: "Going to bed, Klaus?"

He answered, without lowering the *Field*: "Not just yet."

"Well, don't be too long, old chap, will you?"

"No."

I stood by his chair for a moment longer, wondering vainly if I had heard his entrance unconsciously, and if so how long before. If Denfloyd had not been there I should at least have said something more. But irresolution was itself a danger, and I went out into the hall. There I stopped again, and stood staring at the call-board, whercon Lanair had written 11.30. *Tea. No sugar. And a Large Bass.* I can see those words now, neatly chalked in Lanair's small, rather feminine hand, but when I stood staring at them I hardly realized even that he had written them. To anyone passing I should have displayed a droll figure, standing with one hand still on the door-handle, mouth agape, eyes no less bovine than those of the wrecked creature from whom I had just freed myself. When self-consciousness returned I looked round furtively and saw that the girl was still there, in a better chair and with a Spanish shawl about her shoulders, but still alone. For my own sake rather than hers I made a feeble pretence of not seeing her, and went swiftly upstairs. I smiled, then, to think at how low an opinion of me she must have arrived. A man with a screw missing altogether, a dissolute arrived at premature bufferdom. It was a useful smile, for it pricked a leak in the gloom that had suddenly filled

me. By the time I had reached my bedroom I was saying that Klaus was often preoccupied when reading—he would ponder over the advertisement at the back of a tram-ticket—that if the worst had happened a walk and talk in the morning, carefully managed, would put things right, and that it was vain to spoil my night's rest by worrying.

I took off my clothes slowly, braked by spasms of rheumatism in my back and by fatigue. When I was half-undressed Lanair padded in, rubbing his eyes.

"Not asleep yet?" I asked.

"No."

He was wearing his trench-coat over pyjamas so long and voluminous in the trousers that they all but covered his bare feet.

"Have you been in my room?" he asked.

"No, why should I?"

He yawned and blinked at me.

"Thought you might've come to pinch my baccy or something."

"I wouldn't smoke your baccy if it were the last——"

"All right! All right! Only someone came in. I was half asleep, but I woke just as they banged the door."

"Probably someone in the courtyard breaking wood or something."

"No, I'm certain someone came in."

"A pretty girl, perhaps. You should've been sharper. It's no good looking for her here."

"Is Klaus in bed?"

"No, I left him in the lounge. He was sick with excitement over an article on vegetable manures."

"I don't know why you want to be so damned jovial at this time of night."

"Well, I didn't ask you to come in."

"You ought to keep an eye on that boy. He's probably soaking."

"He never over-drinks. Wouldn't think of it."

"Well, he will here. It's the only thing to do in these country pubs, except go to bed."

"Well, I've nothing here except water, so you'd better go back to bed."

He yawned again, almost too sleepy to move.

He said: "There's one kind of man I do absolutely bar."

"Yes?"

"The type that wears long pants."

I opened the door and he went away. His sleepiness had

infected me, and I was yawning once every minute; but as I came to the horrid little night-suit I thought: "I suppose it's rubbish, the idea of Klaus drinking? Someone for a cheap lark might——" For a moment it seemed my plain duty to go down and send him off to bed. But he was not of an age to be treated like that. I was not inclined to meet the lone girl again, this time looking not merely stupid but clownish, more absurd even than Lanair had just appeared. I was too tired to dress again. Besides, it was useless to be grandmotherly—it never worked with young men.

The bottle had been in the bed too long. It had taken the chill off the sheets, but it was cool and clammy now, and I threw it out. The bed was badly sprung, and—more serious discomfort—my window faced the street, so that the noise of the revels in the Corn Exchange came to me quite clearly. I got out of bed again, appreciating its warmth as I did so, and shut every window. But the noise then, instead of attacking me squarely like a man with a club, came as a subtle torture. It was music of a new kind, that I had not learned to understand. It came, they said, from the folk music of the Southern States; moreover it is derived from Stravinsky, they said, and a little from Wagner. Dear Orpheus, from Wagner! It was wilder and more feverish than Irish dances, its time was baffling, it portrayed the moaning distress of slaughter-houses and the rolling of twisted hoops upon corrugated roofing; it expressed the fury of Verdun, the tears of deserted lovers, the pandemonium of petrol engines and the dingy melancholy of a world that Schopenhauer might have made for Freud to people. It was mad and meaningless, it defied all analysis and only the young could painlessly listen to it. Yet, brow-beaten and submerged, tunes found themselves in the midst of that cacophony, tunes that I knew, many I hated and some I loved. Constantly my ears chanced upon them, broke away from my control and chased them hotly through the undergrowth. The blankets covering me were not heavy enough, and the slight rheumatism in my thighs would have been enough to make me restless. I couched my head between pillow and bolster and thought for a few moments that I had my ears captive. But it was only an intermission, and intermissions were short. The din leaked in again, stopped so suddenly that I instinctively raised my head to hear what had happened. There was a crackle of hand-clapping, as if the dancers were faintly pleased with the musicians, and without bashfulness the band drove on. A person was singing now, in a husky, nasal baritone. I could not at first catch the words, but there was something familiar in the undertone of brass upon which

they floated. I listened in dreadful fascination, and suddenly, as the door of the Exchange—I suppose—was opened, they came to me quite clearly; the inevitable words, chopped and staggered to suit the rhythm of fox-trot:

*The snowdrop's shooting up, up,
The snowdrop 'll soon be through
When the snowdrop drops we'll all drop——*

I pulled up the quilt and plunged far down among the bed-clothes, but it reached me there. I put my fingers in my ears and lay cowering. It was stilled at last. Before my closed eyelids men were running, running, over a limitless field to a line out of sight. They ran confusedly at first, crossing like threads in a loom, and I followed them perplexedly. I was tired and helpless. The noise came back again and made my head ache as I watched those figures dodging and turning. I tried to get nearer, but the ache in my legs prevented me from running, and they were running away. Remotely I was still aware that I was in bed, in a hotel, the Angel, in some town of which I could not remember the name. I wondered why Peggy was not with me. The men ceased, at last, to cross and twist. They ran altogether, a hundred of them in a surging mob, and I realized suddenly that they were making for the Nomads' goal-line. I called "Charles!" but my voice was too well smothered by the bed-clothes for him to hear. There was only I to stop them. They were miles away, but their pace was slackening, the goal was not yet visible and they were curving, so that by running across I might cut them off. I trotted on lamely, hoping to wear them down. As if to tease me they fell to my own pace and kept their distance. They were hopping on one leg, dancing to distant music, up and down, up and down, across the reaching shadows. I could not tell where Lanair was, but I heard his laugh, and his voice saying: "It's the old gang. They're off, they've heard the music. They smell blood, you won't stop them now." So it was blood they were after! But whose? Terrified, I struggled to increase my pace, but the bed-clothes held me, and my legs against my will were dancing to the same tune as theirs, dancing. In the closing darkness I kicked and fought, and the runners closing in a circle watched me mirthfully. But my head was free now, and as the noise swelled, the black sky cracked and fell away.

I sat up, blinking in the fierce electric light. There was someone standing by the open door. Klaus. White-faced, unsteady.

I said: "Klaus, what are you——?"

He made a movement, I jumped out of bed and ran towards him.

"Klaus——!"

He raised his hand. I heard a noise like the deft crack of a whip on a frosty morning, felt a gleaming, twisted pain in my shoulder, saw a puff of smoke floating out into the corridor.

With only one pace forward I got hold of the revolver, which he released without a struggle.

"Young fool!" I gasped, and pushed him away. "Get back—your own room—quick! Wash your hand."

But he hardly moved, and I heard someone coming. It was—thank God!—Lanair, running. I was suddenly weak and faint, and I sat down on the floor, which rose to meet me. I saw Klaus's face, exhausted and wretched, and a man coming down the corridor. My eyes closed. Far away I heard Lanair say: ". . . an accident . . . I was showing Sir John . . . old cartridges . . . he couldn't sleep . . . scared of hotel-thieves." Then pain thrust me back into a pit of dark, deep restfulness.

XVII

BREITNER read the letter again, frowning, and shouted down the speaking-tube:

"Frans! See if Captain Kestel's gone. If he hasn't, ask him to come up again."

He put the letter on one side and took up another. From the Insurance people. Unsatisfactory. Kestel came in.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, Captain——"

He could hardly hear himself speak, with the noise of the midday traffic in the Kloveniers Burgwal. He crossed the office and shut the window.

"—I've got a letter"—he turned it over—"from someone called Mayer. German. I wonder if you know him——?"

"Mayer? Where——?"

"Peterhaven. You know the place."

"Too well. The last on God's earth."

"I thought so. This man—his writing's none too good—wants to know something about a stowaway. Are you in the habit of shipping stowaways, Captain?"

"Sometimes."

"I don't remember."

He read:

"DEAR SIRs,

'I must apologize for venturing,' and so on and so on and so forth . . . 'an agency in Hamburg, of which my cousin is one of the directors, and to whom I have written,' and so on and so forth. . . .

"Ah! here we are!——"

"'. . . advising me that the vessel in question was one owned by your good selves. If you——'"

"Which vessel?" Kestel asked.

"That comes later. Ah, here it is——"

"'. . . a boy who disappeared suddenly from Peterhaven, some months ago, and was rumoured to have boarded the ship to which I have alluded above. A friend who is interested in the youth has asked me to make every endeavour to ascertain . . . and with some misgivings I have at last ventured. . . .'"

"I know what he's talking about," Kestel interrupted. "I had the boy. You remember, don't you—no, you were abroad at the time."

Breitner was still reading the second sheet of the letter.

"It comes to this," he said. "He, or this friend of his, wants to get a letter through to the boy. Can we supply an address? But of course, yes," he added drily, "we keep a register of all our old stowaways, and we send them a copy of our House Organ every month. We can't help him, can we?"

Kestel scratched his chin.

"Not much. But one minute——"

The minute swelled into five. Kestel could give orders as sharply as anyone, and likewise information when he had it. When he was uncertain he trod warily, was apt to be discursive. At length Breitner rang his bell.

"I think this will do. Dictation, please, Olga:

"DEAR SIR,

We are much obliged by your esteemed favour dated the 18th inst., in reply to which we have to inform you, with infinite regret, that we have no present information as to the whereabouts of the rascal'—no, cross out rascal!—'the casual passenger to whom you refer. If, however, you were to address a letter "Care of the Senior Officer, The Municipal Prison, Newcastle, England," it is possible, we believe, that that gentleman may be able to re-direct it to your friend'—no!—'to the person in whom your friend is interested.' Paragraph. 'Regretting, Sir, that we are unable to be of further assistance to you, we have the honour to be, dear Sir. . . .'"

"Will that do?"

"I think so." Kestel disliked Breitner and was rather frightened of him. "Yes, that will do, I'm sure."

XVIII

It was Benozzo from whom I first learnt about "A Boy Laughing." I visited him one burning day to hear his report and pay his fee—which was overdue. It was one of my early expeditions, when I was allowed to go about by myself again, and I thought I could walk from the station to Benozzo's residence, keeping in the shade. But I walked half a mile only, and took a cab the rest of the way, ridiculously puffed and shaky in the legs. He gave me a warm welcome.

"It is not often," he said, as he seized a filthy vest from the window-sill and wiped a chair for me, "that I have an English noble to visit me in my humble lodging. Ah, you have been ill, sare, vare, vare ill, close to death. The signorina, she told me, and I read in the newspapers. Ah, but they are dangerous, those little guns. Forgive me, sare, but you should not have fingered it, no, the English are too brave and too rash. An accident so terrible, I wept, I was ill, I could not work. I would have offered my blood, my life——"

"That was good of you, Benozzo," I said (I was fond of the old hypocrite, and it was good to see him again). "But now, about Miss Chelcote——"

"Miss Chelcote!" He flung up his arm and covered his eyes with his torn sleeve. "Miss Chelcote!" he repeated, mounting himself on the daïs and striking a Napoleonic attitude. "She is an artist!"

With an utterance so dramatic his powers were for a moment exhausted.

"She is getting on all right?" I prompted.

"But sare, she is the only artist in England, the only artist in the world. I did not know. How could I have known? How could I have failed to know? I, Benozzo. I tell you, sare, her name will be with Dürer, with Rembrandt. It was there, it was hidden, it was not yet grown, even I did not see it. Genius! It is like this. The line, the touch, the tone, the chiaroscuro—they are exercises, they can be learnt, I can teach them, everybody in the world can do them. But the feeling, the sensibility, the graphic instinct, the drama, the emotion, the imagination. . . ."

He swept on, in his queer, jingling English, lapsing at intervals

into peasant Italian or the French of Montmartre, I had very little idea what he was saying, and as the smell of garlic was almost visible in the room, excluding all other odours, there was nothing to tell me whether the excited rascal were approximately sober. I gleaned at length the fact that Elaine, in the privacy of her own quarters, had done a piece of work which she had timidly shown him and which he had at once proclaimed a masterpiece. Knowing something of Benozzo's mercurial temperament (to give the politest name to his weakness) and knowing, too, that many young students will execute a *tour de force* quite unrelated to their usual capabilities, I was not immediately infected by Benozzo's transports. Indeed, I must have exhibited most undesirably that Saxon phlegm which can well spare such advertisement. But Benozzo's enthusiasm was enough for two, and I had been forced to drink half a bottle of detestable Chianti before I could bring him back to business.

"Now about your fee——" I said at last.

"It is paid, sare, it is paid."

"Oh, Miss Chelcote paid it herself?"

He became magnificent.

"I ask no fee. My reward—it is that I, a humble practitioner, a poor servant of the Muses, have helped, have played a vare little share, in the creation of——"

I had the correct amount ready, with half-a-guinea extra as interest for deferred payment.

"I must see this picture," I said. "If Miss Chelcote's father is pleased I've no doubt that he will—treat you very fairly."

"I ask no fee," he repeated, counting the money with his fingers as he stuffed it in his trouser pocket. "My reward, it is that I——"

"I must be going, Benozzo," I said, feeling myself incapable of further negotiation with a servant of the Muses. "My doctor says——"

"But, sare, you must stay. I will nurse you, I will feela the pulse, I will make herb wine. . . ."

I would have stayed, for I loved to hear him talk; I knew by now how to lead him on, and in time, sitting quietly on his model's throne, a grubby scoundrel in the midst of verminous litter, gazing rather pensively through the window upon the straight, tall houses opposite, he would have bemused us both with his memories, his exact, sensitive memories, of the sunlit fields and the mysterious paintings which his amazing eyes had photographed long ago; but the heat of the morning's sun had been trapped in that low room, the stench was unbearable, and I could not trust myself much longer neither to faint nor vomit.

"I must go," I repeated, "I have business to do."

"Ah yes, sare, you go to make wise laws."

"You must come and see us again," I said. "We often have artists with us. I'll send you an invitation——"

Protesting, thanking, flattering, he led me downstairs.

"And Miss Chelcote," he said as he wrung my hand, "she will some day find a beautiful man who will lead her to the nuptial couch, and she will bear five beautiful sons, and they will be called Michael Angelo, and Da Vinci, and Velasquez, and Raphael, and perhaps a vare little one called Benozzo, and Rembrandt, and Van Gogh. . . ."

I had told the cab driver to wait, and he took me now to Elaine's flat. I had the windows down and with the air driven against my face I arrived feeling much better. Elaine welcomed me from the top of a pair of steps, half-hidden in curtains.

"If you push that chair against the wall and stand on it you can probably reach the rail," she said; and, as I did so, "Good! Now, can you catch hold—good! now can you get the three end hooks on to the rings—no, the little metal rings—good! now hold steady one moment while I——"

But I could not stand up there any longer, with my arms stretched to their limit and my neck craned. I jumped off the chair and sat on the sofa.

"Sorry, Elaine, but——"

"You old slacker!—oh, I say!"

She came down from the steps at one jump, and almost toppled on to me.

"Uncle! you're looking ghastly! I never thought, I——"

"You must respect my dotage," I said.

"But look here, I must get you something——"

I stopped her.

"It's the hot weather. Old gentlemen never can stand it. You've had a man in here," I added, smelling pipe-tobacco.

"No. Only Klaus."

"Klaus?"

"It's his day out. You do give him one miserable half-holiday a week."

"Two. But it's not me—it's Hugo."

"The familiar capitalist argument——"

"And why 'only'?"

"Well, I don't think of Klaus as a man."

"He'd be pleased——"

"I mean, men are always conscious of their man-ness. Always slightly superior to make up for their natural funk——"

"We are flattered——"

"I didn't mean you——"

"I'm not a man either?"

"Too old. You've been male so long that you've ceased to be hot and bothered about it."

"And this, I take it, is what they call the 'devastating frankness of post-war youth'?"

"No, it's what they call 'the fearless discussion of sex.' But I say, are you better now? Honestly? You're beginning to go just a bit pink. I thought at first you were going to fade into a delicate swoon. Shall I get you some tea? Do let me!"

"I should love some, my dear. But first I want to hear about this picture."

"What picture?"

"What picture!"

But she still pretended to be blank on the subject, and I accounted it some evidence of returning wholeness that I saw behind that mask a flicker of eagerness.

"Benozzo's raving about it," I said. "Literally."

"Benozzo?"

"I've just been to see him."

"But you shouldn't have. That awful stuffy room of his, you're not fit for that sort of thing."

"He gave me about a pint of Chianti."

"Benozzo's Chianti! Then no wonder you're looking queer."

"Am I? Still?"

"Pretty——"

"But I want to know about this picture," I persisted.

"You mean 'A Boy Laughing'?"

"Benozzo didn't tell me the title."

"He meant that probably. He thought it was good. I wasn't sure. I thought so, but—one's always thinking. One can't judge one's own stuff."

She turned away from me then, ashamed of her excitement. But I heard it in her level, casual voice.

"Still, it's going to be hung. I heard this morning."

"Elaine! Where?"

She reddened with her effort to sound off-hand.

"The Salon des Quarante."

"Elaine!"

I was so much excited that I nearly kissed her.

"Where is it? Show it me!"

"In Paris, you old duffer."

"It's in oils?"

"No, a dry-point."

"Then you've got an impression——"

"Yes, but—

"Then please—

"I was going to spring it on you as a cheap birthday present."

"My dear, I can't wait till then."

Without genuine reluctance she picked a portfolio from the pile on the window-seat, and with an assumption of carelessness handed me the etching.

"I'm not sure if I like it so awfully now," she said, and mounted the steps again to complete her operations on the curtains.

I took it to the other window so as to get a good light. Certainly it surprised me. But for a characteristic leftward tendency of the shading I should hardly have recognized it as Elaine's work. It was more confident, more professional, infinitely more mature. I could see, before I saw anything else, the influence of Benozzo's labours upon her grammar and syntax. My second thought was that she had chosen her favourite medium for the subject instead of the right one. It should have been in oils, much larger. That, at any rate, was my own view, valueless, because it was the opinion of an ignoramus. But as the picture came slowly to me, as if gradually focussed in a reducing-glass, I forgot that first judgment and forgot also the details of draughtsmanship, which as with many dilettantes had first claimed my attention. The light was towards the right hand of the picture, slanting down leftward out of an open sky on to the single figure in the foreground. To the right it was subdued by the stern of a small fishing boat, which, lightly etched, made a pool of gentle shadow across the beach. The other side was all in shadow, darkened towards the left to indicate subtly a deep cave in the broken Cornish rock. I could not tell why that simple arrangement of light and shade was so impressive. (The picture hangs in our drawing-room now, I have looked at it again, and still I cannot tell.) But I know that it was different from anything I had seen, so different that it would draw the eye in a crowded gallery, although there was no violence, no exaggeration, only the smallest area of deep cutting and little enough that was left wholly unscratched. Elaine had suddenly leapt forward to a point at which I could no longer attempt to follow the process of her art; at which, knowing her as an uncomplex personality, I could only judge that her hand was guided by the mysterious inherited power, different alike from reason and emotion, which is vaguely denoted by the word "genius." The figure was that of a boy naked to the waist, his legs covered

by loose, ragged trousers, the shadow of the fishing boat falling across his bare feet, which I saw, when I looked closely, were a man's feet, big and bony. You could see, when you stopped feeling the picture and started to study it, that the boy had only just come out of the cave, where he had been sleeping. His eyes were strained, meeting the fierce sunshine that glistened on his strong, young body. His arms were bent up at the elbows, his fingers pressed into his palms, his shoulders bent back. His chin was uptilted a little. He was not laughing, only about to laugh; so near to it that you wanted to pull a face at him to set him roaring. Now that my eyes had rested on that beautiful, sunlit body they would not leave it. At first the boy had been only a part of the picture; the centre of it, but not, like a popular actor, limelighted into brilliant solitude. Now, I could see the rest only as the stage on which he stood, harmonious with him but subordinate. The poise, the freshness of his body, the curious, opening mouth, held my eyes as they were generally held only by the finest sculpture. They touched in me an emotion that was beyond the emotion of beauty suddenly perceived.

I said, diffidently, afraid of Elaine in this new manifestation: "I like it. I like it tremendously. It's—I don't know—it seems to me—right out of the rut."

She came to my rescue before I had collapsed quite hopelessly.

"I'm glad you like it. No, don't bother to think of something flattering. I know you do like it or you wouldn't have said so—you're always as cautious as a Scotsman in a cattle-market."

"I do though, Elaine, honestly. Of course what I say doesn't matter a penn'orth of halfpence——"

"It does, Uncle. I've always wanted to please you. You've taken so much trouble, finding Benozzo and lending me books and showing my stuff to people——"

"You're going to give me an impression, aren't you?" I begged, still holding the picture at the window.

"I was going to—for your birthday."

"But I can't wait till then."

"Well, you can have that one. No, you must leave it, I'll get it framed for you. A chaste frame covers a multitude of blemishes."

"I can get a frame," I said, "but you must sign it."

She pencilled her signature on the margin, a signature that she must privily have practised, the E and the C lean and tall, the other letters creeping away like caterpillars.

"There! You can sell it now to a rich American. 'As Exhibited, Salon des Quarante'!"

"And who was your model?" I asked.

"He wasn't. I mean, I didn't have one. I had ideas, and made pencil studies, and got the figure by degrees. It's not quite right now—the navel's just a fraction too low. Benozzo spotted that at once. Still——"

"But the face? Is that synthetic?"

"I don't know. I made it up. I don't quite know how. I didn't take so much trouble with that. As a matter of fact, it was the face of the rock that nearly drove me silly. Of course a professional works that sort of thing in almost unconsciously while he's thinking of nothing but his effects."

"Well, the boy's face is all right. It lives. I know that's not supposed to matter nowadays——"

"I was rather lucky with the face," she admitted. "Now I must get you some tea, quick. I'd quite forgotten."

"Is Klaus coming back?" I asked, as we drank our tea.

"Back? No. At least, he may drop in this evening. He's gone off to have tea with Maurice Bentinck. I don't think he wanted to, but you know what Maurice is."

"It'll do Maurice good to have someone sensible to talk to. Klaus will argue with everything he says."

"He will. They argue here for hours."

"While you patiently knit jumpers?"

"But how did you know I've taken to knitting?"

"I didn't——"

"I'm on my first pair of socks. Quite pre-war, isn't it? Alicia reads out the instructions while I turn the heels."

"And which charitable bazaar is to be thus honoured?"

"I don't know. They're rather too big for a bazaar."

"Of course," I agreed. "Bazaars have a limited amount of space at their disposal."

"Is that tea making you feel better? It's rather weak. I forgot to put in one for the pot."

"It's splendid," I said. "What does Klaus think of 'A Boy Laughing?'"

"He's rather fatuous about it. He first of all made a long speech, a sort of Adelphi review of it all in musical terms. I couldn't have understood what he meant even if he'd only used English terms, but he kept sliding into German polysyllables. And then he pointed to the cave and said 'like a Penitence Chamber!' and laughed. He's always talking about a Penitence Chamber all of a sudden. Then he got frightfully serious again and stood gazing at the thing as if it was something by Picasso and saying 'Very fine! Very fine! *Herrlich! Magnificent!*'"

"It's odd," I remarked, "I've not heard him use a German word for weeks—not since I came out of the Jeyes Fluidarium."

"He always does when he gets emotional."

"Oh?"

"Over music and things. He took me to hear Kreisler at the Troy Hall—that was to celebrate the news that you were allowed out of bed—and he talked German the whole time in the intervals. I kept saying 'Klaus, darling, I don't understand a word,' but it made no difference."

"Did you enjoy Kreisler?"

"Yes. But he's got frightfully British in most ways——"

"Kreisler?"

"No, Klaus, stupid. He's got so broad and big-in-the-chest, and in that overcoat you gave him he looks a Cambridge man to the life. He's developing a waw-waw manner, too, but I shall nip that in the bud."

"Shall? You're rather late starting."

"I know. Of course it came on during the time I didn't see him."

"He deserted you?"

"Yes, the first few weeks you were in hospital. I don't think he saw anybody. Hugo says he worked late at the garage every night, and Aunt Peggy says he spent his spare time just moping about. But of course you know all that. He just went about mooning and glooming and becoming more British every day."

"Would you rather he stayed German?" I asked.

"I don't know. I'm frightfully prejudiced in favour of Englishmen, but I like a man to be what he is, if you see what I mean. Anyway, he'll always be Klaus, he'll always be sort of shy and young and old and wise and simple. And of course, it's his affair, not mine."

"Nor mine, I suppose. But you mustn't neglect his education."

She laughed.

"He doesn't neglect mine. He lectures me on Paul Veronese and the best way of getting from Belsize Park to Paddington and how to hold the wrists when knitting."

"Perhaps he'll be humbler when he hears about the Salon des Quarante."

"He has. He isn't. But I don't mind."

"Neither would I in the circumstances. Jove! I've never had a triumph like that. Scoring a try for the Nomads was my highest. You ought to be happy ever after."

She shrugged her shoulders, and I thought she gave a little sigh.
"I don't know."

It was not till a few days later that I had Klaus's opinion on the picture first-hand. I had secured the offer of a post for him with the Autotec Company, and this was the subject of most of our conversation. The job was a good one, the Autotec people were making great strides and as Hamilton Strewell was Chairman of the Board I had no doubts as to its soundness. I was, none the less, uncertain whether it were good enough for Klaus; whether indeed engineering was his vocation, despite his interest in practical mechanics. I tried to learn his own feelings, but he was diffident and evasive. He was fond of the Bennets and of his work at Pasture Green, had not yet considered seriously the business of making money. I could have got him into Merton had he wished it, but he showed no inclination for Oxford, and Peggy said—no doubt truly—that he was too old for academic lectures and for the society of undergraduates. He was no dilettante; a worker born, as Hugo testified; but he had not yet the ambition, certainly not the snobbish kind of ambition, which would have made him dissatisfied with work on the bench. He was uneasy, suspecting that his keep cost more than what Peggy now allowed him to pay her for "board and lodging," realizing too that Strewell had been friendly to make the offer. But he dreaded big factories and modern offices, he had not the desire for change and for growth that nerves a man to take a shy step forward. That, at all events, was how I interpreted his indecision. "You must take your time, think it over," I said. But I discussed the matter with him often, for I had grown afraid of silences.

It was on our way to Cambridge, where Ernst Gotthold had given the James Lecture and where we were to lunch with him at King's, that I showed Klaus a sheet I had torn out of the Museum copy of *The First Nighter*. It showed a photograph of Elaine, made to look ludicrously *moderne* and *à la mode* by Nicholas Lapoulette. Underneath was a reference to "A Boy Laughing," with an inane joke about A Girl Smiling and the customary irrelevances about smart connections and love of sport.

"What do you think of that?" I asked.

He stared at it and snorted.

"It's a pity she ever did that etching," he said, "if she is going to be made a prostitute by the dirty high-life journalists. I expect Stephen was responsible—he made her give him a copy of that photo."

"Made her?"

"Well, it was not very hard. She hates the thing, and they made her buy six copies."

He was really angry. He disliked Stephen, who was a pretty youth with sharp wits.

I asked: "But you don't really mean you wish she hadn't done that picture?"

"No. I didn't mean that."

"You like it?"

"Yes, yes, it's better than anything she's till now done. It's—genuine."

We travelled another mile, through the rich sunshine, before he spoke again.

"She works very hard. At night, very often. It'll spoil her looks, I tell her. Women ought not to work so hard."

"You have to," I said, "if you want to be an artist."

"Women should not be artists."

"You think not?"

He said seriously: "It's too much of a strain. On the nerves. On the body. Women should devote themselves to keeping their bodies and their souls beautiful. They can't make anything more beautiful."

"But that beauty won't last."

"It can, if it's cared for."

"That's rather a masculine point of view, isn't it? I mean, it would be bad luck on Elaine to have to stop her work, just when she's reached this point, simply——"

"Perhaps," he admitted. "Perhaps you're right."

The men had gone down, and Cambridge was full of panting tourists. In King's the Company of Master Optical Instrument Makers was installed for its Summer Conference. Its members, strutting through the Courts with an expansive air of ownership, were set upon each time they started to cross the grass by infuriated gyps, who for the rest ignored them as ostentatiously as ships' officers among passengers in the third class. Klaus was fascinated by the place; he would have stared at the Screen for twenty minutes and have spent the rest of the day gazing at the Chapel, had I allowed him; but we were late, and I was horror-struck by the thought of any dalliance between him and this light lady, towards whose virtuous sister he had made no advances. The lodge was empty. I approached the shabbiest of the hatless men who were making little errands between one staircase and another, and asked if he could direct me to Professor Cural's rooms. Appearing to awake from a deep sleep

he answered, in a gentle, courteous voice: "If you really want to visit the greatest bore in Cambridge, you will find him up that staircase, over there." We thanked him and followed his directions.

We found Ernst Gotthold alone. His rise to public fame had not magnified his personality; indeed, he looked smaller and more insignificant, very shy and nervous, in that large, flamboyantly furnished room. I thought that he was rather like a frail boy coming home after his first term at boarding-school, as he ran forward to greet me with an extraordinary emotion in his eyes and voice; yet he and I had met but once before. His greeting to Klaus was no less warm, and Klaus responded eagerly; but plainly he had only a faint recollection of his uncle, and they were shy of each other. I would have made some excuse to leave them alone for a minute or two, but I was sure that they would find nothing to say. We all stood, smiling affectionately at each other and saying hardly anything, until our host bustled in.

At luncheon it was Cural who did the talking. He was a man of middle age and florid complexion, bald and muscular, and he was dressed atrociously in sporting tweeds. But for his bow tie, so large that a dramatic critic would not have scorned to wear it, I should have taken him for a soldier who had retired to take up book-making. He was Hilliard Professor of Social Philosophy, and he avoided his subject as if it were poison, preferring to talk about Australia, where he had farmed in his youth, and women, and aviation. While he lectured me on the folly of balloon-craft I heard Ernst and Klaus exchange a few remarks, both speaking in English; but I do not think that either learned anything about the other; they had no safe common ground. Cural discovered in due course that I was a friend of David Holmes, whom he also knew; and, as happens so often when I meet other friends of David's, he ceased thenceforward to speak of anything else. David, it appeared, had taken golfing holidays with him. At every hole Cural outdrove him, and at every hole David won on his putting. It was not, I thought, material for a particularly dramatic Iliad, but with Cural's enthusiasm and a liberal sprinkling of encomiums it lasted until we had finished our Benedictines. And all the while Ernst kept glancing at me, shyly and affectionately, like a spaniel at its master.

We were joined presently by a young man of slightly Latin appearance, who was, I gathered, a Fellow of Caius, and who gagged Cural with a stream of scandalous wit aimed at every considerable personage in the University. I should have enjoyed his cynical tongue, for I had long been denied that kind of gossip, had I not made the journey for a different purpose. I was restless. I wanted

to get Ernst alone, and I wanted to get him alone with Klaus. He had to return to Berlin almost immediately, and it would be hard to find another opportunity. In time I gave up hope. Among two dons we were lost, almost forgotten. They kept us laughing, and they had no other ideas of hospitality. No doubt theirs was a generally sound principle. Three o'clock struck, Ernst had engagements to fulfil, and with a feeling of some disappointment I rose to take my leave.

Ernst, snatching at the departing opportunity, said: "You will come to Berlin, Klaus, some day soon, to stay with me? Your father—I should so like you to come. And you, Saggard, you must come too!"

That was not what I wanted him to say. But I was not sure what I had wanted.

"We shall both come," I said, "yes, soon, directly we have saved up enough for the fare."

The dons, standing politely on one side, were watching us as tactful gaolers watch a criminal conversing with a visitor. We broke away awkwardly, leaving Ernst between them smiling rather forlornly.

"You will come to Berlin, soon?" he repeated, and waved a little spotted handkerchief, until we disappeared round the bend of the staircase.

"He's a good sort, your uncle," I said as we crossed the Court. "I wish he was going to be in England longer."

He agreed. "He's very nice." Then, "Very German."

"Would you like to stay with him?" I asked casually.

(Him, rather than Charles, I thought.)

"I don't know. I don't—remember him very well. I'm not sure if I'd like staying away from home."

"You wouldn't like to see Germany again?"

I was frightened, the next moment, by my temerity in asking that question.

He did not reply. He seemed to be looking right through the buildings on the other side of King's Parade, and I could see that his thoughts travelled an immeasurable distance, immeasurably fast. Then he closed his eyes and shook his head sideways, a movement so slight that I might not have noticed it.

We got into the car, and upon a sudden inspiration I turned left to go out by the Huntingdon road. It was thoughtless of me, as I realized afterwards, not to give Klaus a chance of seeing some of the Colleges; and at another time I myself would not have left Cambridge on a sunny afternoon without at least a stroll along the Backs. But

I was preoccupied; a little sleepy, perhaps, with the effects of the heat and good victualling. I was disturbed, too, by the meeting with Ernst Gotthold, by the memory he had brought back to me, by a note of questioning which I thought I had seen in his eyes. It had been unsatisfactory, that brief encounter. We should not have arranged to meet in the presence of strangers. Perhaps, after all, I had better take Klaus for a week-end in Berlin—though the thought of it troubled me. Not yet, I argued. Not till he had seen the summer out and smelt the first days of an English autumn.

Klaus himself had lately overhauled the Vauxhall, had tuned her lovingly, and she ran like a youthful thoroughbred, silent on the smooth tarmac, ready to burst ahead whenever I bade her. It was a crime to go so fast through the sleepy, sunbathed country, leaving a dust-cloud and a stench of oil in our wake; but I had an object in view, and I must reach it while the sun was still high. It was delight now to have left Cambridge, baked and crawling with sight-seers, and to be cool again in the breeze which our pace made for us. Years before I had bicycled with Charles along this road, against a fierce wind, and as inns and corners suddenly pricked my memory I almost laughed to feel so fine a person, travelling in such luxury. For a few miles I forgot Klaus altogether, in the sheer happiness of driving so lively a craft, of being so comfortable and selfish. I waved joyfully to children swinging on wooden gates, to copper-faced women at the doors of low stone cottages, even to the wicked poultry who spoilt my speed and whose lives I grudgingly delivered. And Klaus, for all that time, was silent.

"Would you like to drive?" I asked suddenly.

"No thanks."

"The country's very flat, isn't it?"

"Yes, but it's pretty."

"Worried about something?"

"No."

He smiled faintly. His thoughts were far away.

Godmanchester, dozing in the heat, looked wantonly untidy. There was a new petrol station, flaunting brilliant colours, but desolate and unattended. Market carts stood empty in the streets, the sleeping horses still restlessly swishing their tails against the flies. Bicycles were propped against the houses or sprawled flat on the footpaths, as if their owners had been too tired to drag them farther. Only a few urchins rolled and quarrelled in the dust, only the flies were both active and happy. The clock of St. Mary's struck four, but it woke nobody. We passed over the bridge and tiptoed through Huntingdon, ashamed of our presence, yawning dangerously to avoid

the townsfolk who were too sleepy to hear us coming. Then on to the outskirts of Upton, where I opened out and drove hard along the North Road, and all but missed the brand-new signpost which marked my turning.

From the hard motoring track, an outer extension of London's amenities, we came suddenly into a shadowed lane. When we had twisted twice, and left behind a little wood which blanketed the last rumble of main-road traffic, the hours which had just passed—breakfast at Church Row, luncheon at Cambridge—faded abruptly, and I slipped back through twenty or thirty years, regarding and feeling consciously what had once come upon unconscious, virgin senses. I knew every turn in the road here, every stile, though we were still five miles or so from the Rectory. I had been along this lane two or three times in the last dozen years, but I was surprised again at the shortness between point and point, how low the little hills were and how insignificant the stone gateway of Colonel Drove's domains. A new fence had lately been put up along the length of Poulter's farm, and with the sun blazing on it it still exhaled a warm smell of creosote. Half a mile farther on some clown had put down, in an open field, an artizan's square cottage which he might have sawn off from the end of a suburban row; and had left it unfinished, with heaps of sand and brick all round it, and a gap fifty yards wide in the hedge to mark his trespass. At the entrance to the place where the Misses Sewick had lived someone had fitted iron gates. The Misses Sewick had always done without gates; and more than once I had blessed them, for the narrow entrance, meeting the road at a sharp angle, was hard enough to turn a trap into. In places a wire fence had been substituted for the bramble-hedge, and of the row of elms between Lockyer's and the Gamecock only four were still standing. But when we had passed through the little level crossing and over Join Hill—a mere bump now, which the Vauxhall hardly noticed—we came to a stretch that had not been tampered with. Miss Tullop's post office had, indeed, been painted, and too brightly. The forge now boasted a petrol pump. But the village was authentic, the road bumpy in the middle, the pump disused but still standing, the signpost still maliciously announcing that it was only two miles across the fields to Linnett; a solid picture, seen in a reducing glass, known by every inch of its outline but in its essence unfamiliar.

I left the car outside Turner's, and Turner's nephew, transformed into a reliable tradesman, promised to keep his eye on it. It wanted some effort to walk the remaining mile or so, but the trees would give us some shade and I wanted to get right away from the

infesting stink of engine-oil. The move was successful, and as we turned up Putting's Lane a slight breeze brought the very smell of hedge-herbs, dust and cowsheds which had once filled my nostrils as I tore up the lane on a bicycle with the news of my scholarship. We walked slowly, for the heat reminded me that I was not long out of convalescence. It was there that Klaus broke his silence.

"It's a lovely place."

"I like it," I said.

(But I had no wish to return.)

He sniffed appreciatively, surprising me by the pleasure he took in that smell.

"You know, Uncle" (he spoke jerkily, hesitating)—"we might not have—had this run together."

I was taken by surprise, having thought that we had done with that subject.

"I suppose we were meant to have it," I said. "But anyway, what might or might not—well, we needn't bother about that any more. I'd rather not, you know, honestly."

He said shortly: "No."

Instead of turning in at the Rectory gate I went on and led the way round by Lark Lane, walking slowly.

"I wanted to explain something," Klaus said.

One of the chestnuts was still standing in the cricket-field, and though the gap in the hedge had long since been repaired there was another farther on. I brushed through it and Klaus followed.

"We'll sit in the shade and have a smoke," I said.

I sat with my back to the trunk, so that I could see Warden Hill; a horrid tin cattle-shelter had been erected near the top, but it was some way off, and the hill was still yellow with buttercups. Klaus lit his pipe and lay down on his stomach, propping his chin, his head a little way in front of my feet, so that I could not see his eyes as he talked.

"I wasn't well," he began. "I didn't know it then, but I'd been ill a long time. I felt all right, but I didn't remember anything. Only the Abbey, and I didn't remember that very well."

"I know how it was," I said; "it's not worth trying to remember."

In spite of our pipes the flies came in multitudes to visit us. Except for a slap when they settled on his neck, Klaus took no notice.

"I didn't want to, I was afraid to. I don't suppose I could have. But after I had—you know, in the Angel—I couldn't stop remembering. It had been there, you see, making me unwell.

That was what made me—you see? I see now because I—have backwards gone, some way. You see?"

I did see.

"You needn't tell me, old man, I—I knew before, in a way."

But he told me, as I sat uncomfortably against the tree-trunk, flicking my handkerchief at the relentless flies, counting as the church clock told the quarters. It was a confused story, and I could not follow half of it; neither had he, I think, remembered everything or arranged what he remembered in proper sequence. He spoke rapidly, as if he were loosing something that he wanted to get out of his mind for ever; and that was perhaps his main purpose in telling the story at all. His memory of the journey that he and his mother had made to Birnewald was terribly vivid. His mother's death he remembered only vaguely, and less of what immediately followed. But of his last weeks in Birnewald he gave what seemed to be a fairly complete account. The friends he had made, odd friends, were confused with each other so that I could not follow their identity; but he spoke a great deal of one Gustav, and especially of a youth to whom he referred usually as Max but sometimes as Erich; who, he said repeatedly, had been kind to him. "And I liked Kudrnac," he said, but Kudrnac I could not understand. The last thing he remembered was a fire. He had been in a factory of some sort, and he was certain that English soldiers had attacked and set fire to it. The fire itself was plainly no figment of his imagination. I could think of nothing to explain his belief in the English soldiers, but when he insisted that he had seen and actually fired upon them I did not argue. We could return to that later, I thought. The rest of his narrative he could not have invented; and remembering my walk through the desolate streets of Birnewald I had no reason to doubt it; though it was hard to picture those things, with my eyes looking left across fields quivering in the heat to where the sun shone on Soberdale Woods.

"But how did you get to Peterhaven?" I asked him.

He shook his head and tapped the top of it. "It's there," he said, "but" (putting a finger on his temple) "not here. Somebody helped me. Not Max, somebody else. But I can't remember who it was."

I was getting cramped. The twigs beneath and the flies above made me restless; small, creepy things kept falling between my collar and the back of my neck. I got up, stretched, and brushed the seat of my trousers.

"Shall we finish our walk?" I said.

There were wooden railings now opposite the old barns, but

with no great difficulty I loosened one of them and led the way into the Land of the Midianites. We were trespassing, but I could explain matters when I was accosted. Here there was no great change. The Land of the Midianites was still a dumping-ground for weeds and plants that grew too prodigally in worthier parts of the garden, sunflowers and Michaelmas daisies, a few gooseberry bushes, thriving in banishment, jostling with the sorrel and nettles. There was still a litter of broken pots, handles of gardening tools, wrecked and rotting wheelbarrows. The cistern was still there, and it still stank foully. We passed on through the orchard and rounded the greenhouse to the lawns. Here there were new beds cut, which I thought a pity, and the state of the paths showed that old Cragg had long since departed. It looked as if a Hampton Court trained man was in charge now, with a boy or two under him. The steps had been made up, and the upper part of the main path had been flagged. The yew hedge was as trim as the head of a Kenya negro, the lawns neatly edged, and in the new flower-beds there were *Lælias*, *Princes de Bulgarie*, and other fantastic strangers. The croquet lawn had been made into a Dutch Garden. The architects of all this grandeur were nowhere to be seen. They had not yet repaired the damage done to their handiwork by the light breeze which had played in the morning and which had taken a few of last year's leaves from the pile beyond the shrubbery and dropped them on the lawns. To me that was a merciful untidiness.

"... I don't know what happened to Max," Klaus said. "I saw him looking down at me, and then the smoke filled my eyes and throat. I don't think I ever saw him after that. I never thanked him. ..."

I looked up at the house. It had become a little smaller, and the woodwork had been lately painted, white. Strangely, I could not remember what colour it had been in the old days.

I said, partly to myself and partly to Klaus: "When Charles was a small boy he used to take——"

But I stopped abruptly.

The window of my father's study was open at the bottom, but the other windows were all closed, and in those of the lower rooms the curtains were drawn right across. The family was away, I guessed, and the place in charge of servants. So far no one had seen us. I stood up on one of the new rustic seats and looked back into the orchard. Probably the trees were different ones; I could not remember how they had stood before. There was no one there, and the white dress I saw close to the trunk of an apple tree vanished, when I blinked my eyes, into the green and brown beyond. I

glanced to the left and saw that the chicken-house had been taken away.

Klaus said: ". . . I'm glad, in a way, that my mother died then. She was very unhappy. Konrad had gone, and I didn't know how to get a doctor. It was best, I think now."

I answered him as best I could. But I would not let myself think of Hedwig, old and childish, in that darkened room; the awful quietness of her voice, and then her laughter. I wanted him to see what I saw, among the apple-trees. But it was not time yet.

"We must be getting on," I said.

I stopped again to look at the house. The white paint, after all, was a superficial decoration, a touch of powder on the cheeks of a sunburned woman. The rich red-brown of the walls was still the same, the ivy nestled to it, and the colours blended as if the same artist had chosen them both. I wished that the windows were not shut and sightless, but I should not have cared to see through them to foreign furniture, nor to hear foreign laughter. The place was quite silent, except for the birds; a lovely body from which life had departed. The garden must hate to be in such smart clothes, but looking all round I could still see no houses, no defilement except the shelter on Warden Hill. I would leave it like this and not come again. Charles could come if he wished—and I suspected that he came sometimes to chat parochially with the new Rector and on some excuse to stroll by himself through the orchard. But I should take Klaus away from this garden and keep him with me. That was the best that I could do for her.

The shadow of the house was creeping towards us as we lingered, and not venturing to tread on the perfectly mown lawn I began to go slowly up the path, Klaus following a step behind, looking about him every way as if he faintly recognized the scene. I was hardly aware of his presence, set about as I was by a cloud of presences. As if each were drawn upon glass with a transparent pigment I saw one scene behind another; Charles on a fresh May morning waiting on the terrace for me to go and bathe with him; my mother coming out through the French windows of the drawing-room in her black evening dress—that picture which the words "noble lady" would always conjure for me; giant flakes of snow falling so thickly that the elms were almost hidden, my father in his funeral coat, a Bible in his pocket and grandfather's stick in his hand, setting out to catch a poultry thief he had seen approaching through the orchard; warm evenings in summer, with the sound of *Shall we gather at the river?* floating out from the schoolroom; sharp January mornings, the last day of Christmas holidays, Jan's Pond frozen thick enough for

skating and the whole of Boswell's "Johnson" to be read before the train left at eight to-morrow; rain pouring steadily, whispering against the trees, gurgling in the gutters, running in a little stream down the path, on the day fixed for Mabel's birthday picnic; Jupiter's death, there, in the middle of the lawn, without a growl or a whimper; a high wind drumming the night-nursery windows, wet leaves, autumn sunsets. I jumped when I heard Charles' voice, loud and living; and turned to see that it was Klaus who spoke at my shoulder.

"I like this place," he said. "I should like to live here."

"You mean the house?"

He glanced up, as if noticing it for the first time.

"Yes. And the garden. And the view, that hill over there with the yellow flowers."

"It's a very ordinary English scene," I said. "And just an ordinary English rectory. There are hundreds of them like this, always too big for the person to keep up, with great gardens that run to a wilderness if he does his visiting properly."

He said: "But still, I should like to live here. And the orchard's so nice, with the sun coming down through the leaves."

"Yes," I said, "it's a jolly orchard."

We walked to the end of the little terrace, and on to the kennel yard. On the near side the gate was bolted, but with a hand-up from Klaus I got on top of the wall and jumped down on to a bundle of pea-sticks.

"Who lives here?" Klaus asked me.

"I believe his name's Gresham Montague. He seems to be away at present."

I was filled for a moment with childish pleasure. There, leaning against the mossy wall among the rakes and pea-sticks, rusty beyond any recognition but mine, was my own beloved bicycle. For a moment I thought of taking it away—we could tie it on to the luggage-grid quite easily; but a vision of Peggy's long-suffering smile prevented me. I looked inside Jupiter's kennel; it was inhabited only by broken flower-pots. The gate on the drive side was open and we went on.

"I must bring Elaine to see this place," Klaus said. "She would like it awfully."

"There's no place in the world like it," I said.

We walked slowly down the drive and back to the village. I was tired after so much loitering, and I dropped with relief into the near seat of the car, leaving Klaus to drive. As far as the main road we had the sun right behind us, sharpening the borders of the twisting road and the outlines of the farther hedges, so that my memory of that country should be bold and vivid if in some melancholy future

I were to come again. But I would not let my mind wander any more, as it strove to do with my eyes meeting another view. I closed them, content with the cool wind on my burning cheeks, and when I opened them again we were racing down the North Road. We began to talk, about cars and about Hugo.

At Biggleswade, where we had dinner, Klaus said:

"When I'm married I shall live in a country rectory."

"Are you thinking of getting married?" I asked.

He smiled.

"Of course, I had forgotten. One must get married before one can live with a wife in a rectory."

"And one must first find a lady to marry one."

"Yes."

"Perhaps you could manage that——"

He shook his head.

As we left Baldock behind us he said:

"No, I couldn't ask anyone. You've got to be—quite well, inside. When you've—killed people, and hated people——" (he raised one hand from the wheel and made an odd, scattering gesture) "—and hurt people and lived in a factory with murderers—I don't mean they could avoid themselves——"

We were swinging out and racing on a straight piece to pass a lorry which pulled a truck behind it. The noise drowned the rest of his sentence, and I made no answer.

When we got home, a little after ten, I found a pile of letters waiting for me, smaller than the usual pile. I stripped them and ran through to see if any wanted attention. There was a reminder that my half-yearly subscription to the Fortescue Society had not been paid, an invitation to become Patron of some animal welfare association, a bill or two, a note from Mabel to say that I was wrong about the walnut sideboard—it was not by Pennystole, a warning about Russia and the opium trade, two requests for assistance from men who had each lost a leg at Jutland, two more from men who had lost arms at Verdun, a cheque from Lord Chelcote, a circular from an anonymous blackmailer, a few advertisements, and a letter from Major Pewey. Life had begun again. I read through Pewey's letter.

"MY DEAR SAGGARD,

I'm ashamed of myself for not writing to you before—my wife and I were *most* grateful to you for all the trouble you took over finding work for young Haines. I've had a happy letter

from him and he seems to be going straight. The fact is, I've been pretty busy, quarrelling with a pigheaded local J.P., and a run to Marlborough, where the boy had mastoids. All over safely now, thank God. I still haven't time to write you a proper letter, but I will do so before long. I enclose a letter from Germany addressed to Klaus."

The enclosure was a crumpled envelope, addressed in pencil in an awkward, sprawling hand. I was tempted to open it myself—from nervousness as much as curiosity—but I gave it to Klaus as it was. He was puzzled when he read it—that I could see from his face—but he said nothing and stuffed it in his pocket.

"From a friend?" Peggy asked.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Someone I don't remember."

Peggy was tired, after a day of exasperating committees, and after a single game of hazy whist we went to bed.

Klaus was down before me next morning, and when I found him in the dining-room he looked as if he had had a bad night. He was pale, and his eyes were red.

"I've remembered her now," he said, "the person who wrote that letter."

I had forgotten about the letter, and for a moment I could not think what he meant. Then I asked:

"Oh, who was it?"

He told me that it was a girl who had been among the company of ruffians in the factory at Birnewald. She had looked after him, he said, after the fire, but he could not remember much about that. It was with her that he had journeyed to Peterhaven, and there, somehow, they had lost each other.

He did not show me the letter, then. He was silent during breakfast, and ate hardly anything. As I was about to leave he asked me if I could get off a cable for him, and wrote it down on a piece of paper. It was addressed to "Berta, bei Hochmann, Hamburg 3, Pitschstrasse 28," and the message was simply "*Dein Brief erhält Werde schreiben.*" I promised to send it off.

In the afternoon Hugo rang up the Ministry, so urgently that the girl put him through to me, although it was my "close hour." His voice was much agitated. Klaus, he said, had appeared very seedy all day, and after lunch had asked permission to take a run in the Buick. He was not back yet. Hugo had not thought of

refusing, but was now cursing himself. "I thought I'd better tell you," he said. I reassured him. "Of course you couldn't have stopped him." But inwardly I was far from comfortable.

A very bad hour and a half passed, in clumsily conducted interviews and letters that had to be dictated three times over. I had seized a brief interval between the visits of a Treasury official and some portentous High-and-Nobody to ring up Church Row, but Klaus had not been seen there. Shortly before five, when I was stammering with nerves, another private call came through. It was from Charles.

"I thought you'd like to know that Klaus has been with me. Yes, he came over by car. I thought you might. . . ."

Something went wrong with the line, and when I tried to get on again Charles had rung off. I passed on the news to Hugo. Then, puzzled and still anxious, I told Miss Gay I would knock off early, left my papers for her to sort and put away, and went home.

Klaus arrived shortly after me. He was subdued, but looked better than he had done in the morning, and happier, I thought. Of the afternoon's doing he told us:

"I had a headache, and Hugo let me go for a run. I made a visit to Uncle Charles."

We asked no questions, and it was from Charles that we had a fuller account, in a letter I received two days later. I have copied a part of it.

"I hope Klaus is all right now. Poor chap! I felt sorry for him. I don't know why he came to me, we hardly knew each other, but I suppose he doesn't know many parsons, and young fellows do come to me when they're in trouble. I'm glad, because it justifies an existence that sometimes doesn't seem somehow to get anywhere.

"He didn't come to the vicarage, first of all, he went straight to the Church. Jackson came and told me, he was rather frightened, he's not used to finding anyone praying in the church. 'Praying aloud in Latin,' he said. I think he thought I ought to get the police. I went across straight away and found Klaus kneeling at the Communion Rail, he was as still as if he were asleep, and I thought from his face he might be ill. I knelt beside him, and after a time he got up and started to go away, and I beckoned him into the vestry. He said he wanted to confess. I remembered then your telling me he was R.C. I said I was a Protestant and didn't hear confessions, but we might have a talk together. He

wouldn't say much at first, but I just sat and waited, and in the end he told me the whole story. There were parts I couldn't understand, I could see his mind was very sick and I didn't bother him to explain what wasn't clear, but I saw how things were. I said I couldn't decide for him, he must do that himself, but that HE would have done the most unselfish thing. Then we went back into the Chancel, and knelt at the Rails again. I prayed with him and said the Collect for the Ninth Sunday after Trinity. We were there for a long time. When we came out he thanked me as if I had done him a service. I asked him if he could stop for tea, but he said he must get back, and I didn't press him. He got into his car and went straight off.

"I do hope he's made up his mind and is quite happy now. Do tell him to come to me again if he wants to, if he thinks I can help him. You understand, don't you, that I don't want to butt in. He couldn't have anyone better than you to advise him, and honestly I'd leave it all to you. But there are times when a fellow wants a Priest—though I don't like that word, as you know, and wouldn't use it if Father was still living—and though I'm not in any way like a Priest the collar makes a difference, if you see what I mean. And I think sometimes a fellow will go to a stranger when it would hurt him to go to his best friend. You understand, don't you? I do hope you see what I mean.

"I hope you're absolutely fit again now. I must come and see you soon. I haven't yet got to the bottom of how the accident happened, everyone is so vague, you must tell me when we meet. Give my love to Klaus. . . ."

I saw what he meant.

We had a walk over the Heath that last evening, the three of us together. We walked hard and did not talk much. It was dark before we reached home, a hot, stifling night. We sat reading in the drawing-room, near the windows, which we had wide open; smoking to keep away the mosquitoes. Klaus and I were restless and fidgety. Peggy was as ill at ease as we, but nothing in her face or movements, as she sat embroidering a sideboard-cover, betrayed her. She and I went to bed soon after eleven, leaving Klaus to finish (as he said) an article in the *London Mercury*. But I went down later in my pyjamas and found him pacing the garden.

"You'd better turn in," I said, and I added, with no particular reason, "things are always clearer in the morning."

It was then that he showed me the letter. Translated, it read:

"DEAR KLAUS,

Herr Mayer says he knows how to send you a letter and he will send this to you, but he says you may not get it. Herr Mayer says you went away in that steamer. Are you coming back? I do want you to come back. Do come.—BERTA."

"Are you going?" I asked him.

"I don't know. I'm not sure yet. Do you think I ought to?"

I could have spent a year debating that question; and then, perhaps, I should not have been sure. Klaus wanted an answer, there and then, and I thought I knew which one he wanted.

I said: "Yes."

We went upstairs, and I followed him to his bedroom.

"You needn't decide finally till to-morrow," I said. "You'd better sleep on it. Even then, it won't be final."

"No."

But I had someone else in my mind, and I thought that it would be final.

"You know," I said, "I'll do—anything I can. You must tell me what you want——"

He turned away, and stretched his arm backward to squeeze my hand. He whispered: "Good night."

I went to tell Peggy. But somehow she knew already.

Next day I came up to town, and I took him to Queen Anne's Gate to get a passport. Then to Cooks. The clerk agreed that the Hook route was the most comfortable; the night boat was at eleven forty-three from Parkeston Quay; Liverpool Street nine thirty-five. I should have preferred something earlier—I wanted to cut short the hours between—but I let it go at that and bought the ticket. There would be plenty of berths, the clerk said. Klaus went back to Hampstead to pack up his things, and I to Whitehall.

For the rest of that long working day I was thinking of a dozen better plans: I would go over to Hamburg myself and bring the girl back with me; I would send Peggy with Klaus—it was madness to let him go alone; we would all go together; no, such a fuss would be ridiculous, he was grown-up, he could look after himself, he wanted to go. I should have done no work, but Miss Gay—God bless her!—drove me pitilessly. I left early for the second day running, travelled standing in a packed train, and reached home with a splitting head.

Klaus's bags—or rather mine, with his label on them—were ready in the hall; a couple of big portmanteaux and a suitcase—not merely week-end luggage. With Peggy he had made his farewells

already, I could see that. She was pale and exhausted, but except for a certain briskness, a redoubling of her normal efficiency in attending to a hundred domestic details, she gave no sign in speech or action of what had passed. She had packed Klaus's things herself, and wanted him to be sure and remember where his bedroom slippers were. She had advice for him about getting a cabin as far as possible from the screws. "And don't be alarmed if you hear the water-tight doors shutting," she said, "they always do if there's a fog. I do hope it will be fine at the Hook. Put a cap on if you're on deck in the early morning, you can catch a nasty cold that way."

In our bedroom she said to me: "I've told Elaine. I asked her to come over but she wouldn't. I think she's right. She'll meet you at the station—I'm not going myself. I thought you'd better have dinner at the station, it's always easier like that."

We had made the common mistake of completing the final preparations much too early. Klaus and I went for a last walk, down in the direction of Platts Lane. He said: "I feel—ungrateful. I don't know how——" but we left the rest unspoken; we had got as far as that. Less than half an hour had gone when we returned to the house. We ate some biscuits which we could not taste and drank a glass of lemon-squash which nearly made us sick. We wandered into separate rooms and read meaningless books. "It's ridiculous," I thought, "he won't be gone more than a week. Hamburg isn't Honolulu." But the sea was between, and a ship grows smaller so slowly, and when it has disappeared there will still be hours before it sights land again.

It was time at last to get out the car. With Kibbell's help I carried out the luggage and put it in the back. Then I sounded the horn once and waited. Klaus came almost immediately, tight-lipped, and we drove to the station in silence.

London went about its business, sweating. I steered correctly through the traffic, cut things rather fine when overtaking, obeyed policemen's signals. But my thoughts, now, were wholly upon Elaine. There had been a railway smash near Doncaster, seven killed, forty-three injured. I put the car in a garage and the luggage in charge of an outside porter. A man of impeccable gentility whom I did not know accosted me and said that he was glad to see me looking so well again. Could I spare him a few moments, any time, at my home, in my club or at the Ministry, to discuss a feature of the accident in February which was not altogether clear? Naturally his readers would like first-hand information . . . I heard what he said but could make nothing of it. I said something vague to satisfy him and we went on into the Great Eastern Hotel.

In the restaurant Elaine was waiting for us, and had already ordered three Martinis. She was very smartly dressed, with a good deal more make-up on her face than she used as a rule. She smiled when she saw us.

"I thought we might have a drink to start off with," she said. "And you must have a good solid meal, Klaus, to keep your tummy steady on the boat."

But Klaus would not have his Martini, and I drank it for him. I disliked the stuff, but I wanted it.

I sent Klaus out to buy a paper and while he was away I asked Elaine:

"Would you rather I pushed off? I can get dinner elsewhere and meet you afterwards. I expect you'd——"

"No," she said, "I'd rather you stayed."

We were surrounded by business-men discussing the franc and the fall in wheat futures. The windows were all open and the street noises came in to make a background for the nearer rumble of financial platitudes. From a table near the door I caught the voices of a young man and woman ceaselessly arguing about their evening's entertainment. I made fitful conversation about the heat, about other hot days I remembered, about the first time I had stayed in this hotel, about other hotels I had stayed in, about Athens and Constantinople. Probably they wanted to strangle me, but I think it was better than silence. We went through two courses. Desperate for another subject I opened the paper and saw "A Thousand Men Starving"; "Bride Defies Superstition." I folded the paper and put it away in my pocket. Elaine said: "I wonder if you've forgotten all your German, Klaus," and he answered without expression: "No, I don't think so." He, I think, was the least unhappy; for he had had his struggle, and the worst was over. To me there appeared a new look in his eyes, a look of resolution, the light of spiritual conquest. Well, I had wanted him to be whole in mind and steadfast of will.

It was like the sun appearing on a grey winter day when Lanair arrived on the scene. He was magnificent in full evening dress, with a carnation in his buttonhole, and I knew at once that the poor wretch was in love again. He came over to our table beaming.

"I've only two minutes," he said, "I'm meeting a man at my draughts club. I rang up and Peggy told me you were all feeding here.—Yes, waiter, I'll have an egg-and-soda." He pulled a chair across and sat down. "So you're taking a trip, Klaus? Well, you beware of them wicked furriners. If a man with a long nose and a smile comes up to you and says 'Me cally Colonel's luggage. Me

show Colonel nice small girl, vare nice, vare clean,' you give him a snozzler on the boco. You'll find if you don't she's a parti-coloured old hag with all her front teeth missing. Oh, I'm sorry, Elaine, I didn't realize you were here." In a loud whisper, "I say, what are these heavies behind talking about? I can't make out a word of it."

We made him stay with us till we had finished eating, and he told us three stories, the last of them so disreputable that we roared with laughter and the waiters drew about us to catch the next one. He jumped up then, put a roll from my plate in his pocket, and called for his bill.

"You'll come and see me sometime?" he said to Elaine. "A lonely bach, you know. Well, so long, Klaus! A rivederci, as the Russians say. Look here!" He leant forward and whispered. I saw the note whisked across. "Buy a bun—you know."

With a word in my ear—"Cependant il va revenir, mon vieux"—he was gone.

He had made a few of the wretched minutes pass, and we were able now to pretend we had to hurry. We left our coffee untasted, Elaine her cigarette half-smoked, and went out into the vestibule, where the members of a conference which had just adjourned were talking in groups about confidence, goodwill, lower profits, energy, vitality, brass tacks and *esprit de corps*; down to the station, where the electric lamps had abruptly dismissed the lingering daylight and in the swarming crowd under an immense roof we lost all sense of summer.

Things went too well. With time to spare, we came at once to the right platform; the luggage appeared immediately, as it never does to hasty and harassed travellers. I found a corner seat on the platform side of a nearly empty carriage, stowed the bags, and went off to buy magazines and tobacco. When I returned, Elaine and Klaus were standing two feet apart, talking dispassionately and quite ignorantly about exchange rates. Klaus took the magazines but not the tobacco; he had plenty, he said. Was there anything else he would like? No, nothing, thanks. Did he mind his back to the engine? No, not at all, it was all the same. He would be sure to send us a card, or perhaps a cable? Yes, of course he would.

The remembered loathing for railway stations came upon me with all its force; their hideous mechanism, their maddening noise and bustle, their callous indifference. At the door of the next carriage a youth and a girl stood gripping hands, unable to speak, on the brink of purgatory. Stout Dutchmen over for a few days on business pushed past them as if they were milk-cans and shouted directions between their heads to the porters. I thought of Peter-

borough—that, at any rate, had been swift and sudden, like deaths I had seen in Flanders. Had I been by myself I should have said “good-bye” and gone; but I had not the surgeon’s pluck to rob Elaine of her last few minutes with him. On the next line an engine was snorting so loudly that we could hardly hear each other speak. I glanced at the clock, and there were still five minutes.

A woman came to take one of the remaining seats. In a guttural English she asked Klaus what time the train was due at Harwich, and I could see that she was surprised when he answered her in fluent German. Yes, he looked very English; his hair, his clothes, everything but a line or two in his jaw and mouth; a good type of young Englishman, broad in the shoulders and with a good chest, strong, grave, sure of himself, with kindly eyes. We had done pretty well, in so short a time. Had it been w——?—but I would not let myself think like that.

He had been firm and collected till now, only his eyes uncertain, as they had been at Newcastle, his thoughts remote and running. When carriage doors began to slam he seemed to awake to the significance of the moment, his eyes moistened and his lip trembled slightly. I moved away, and he came close to Elaine and said something in her ear, his hands on her shoulders. She tried to smile. A porter told him to take his seat. He got in and leaned out of the window.

I said: “Well, good-bye, Klaus. We’ll see you again soon.”

He did not reply, but for a moment or two he held my hand in a fierce grip. That, really, was as much as I wanted.

“Well, good-bye, Klaus!” Elaine said.

God! She was smiling again.

She climbed up on the step, jumped lightly, and kissed him on the cheek. I heard him whisper, “*Gott mit Dir, meine Liebe.*” A whistle sounded and we were ordered to stand back. The train should have gone then, but it did not go, it didn’t go for an hour. At last, as if impelled by an unseen force, it moved gently forward. We walked with it a little way, began to lose ground, and stood still, waving. At an increasing pace the last coaches passed us. I saw big, German faces, smelt a Rhineland cigar, heard German voices. Far up, just moving out now into the open steel-blue evening, we saw Klaus still waving.

Elaine and I walked slowly down the platform, hustled by porters with trolleys but paying them no attention. In a pool untroubled by the currents, between a tobacco kiosk and the headrail of a Tube entrance, we stopped to take our bearings.

I said, in a colourless voice: "You'd better—have a howl by yourself. You'll feel better." I fished out a penny and gave it to her. "I'll meet you again here, in about ten minutes, longer if you want it."

While she was gone I found a call-box and telephoned to Peggy.

". . . Yes, he got off all right. No, not very crowded. Shall I bring Elaine back with me? I don't like to dump her in the flat—Alicia's not going to be in till late."

Peggy replied: "Yes, do. No, no she won't want to be anywhere he's just been. Take her to the Marshalls', Audrey will put you both up. No, I'd rather you stayed with her. Oh, I'm all right, David's just come in, we're going to have a game of chess and then I'll go to bed. No, dear, only tired. Yes. But don't go too far, you must be careful still. Good night. . . ."

The confectionery stalls were all shut, but at the buffet I secured half a pound of chocolate, which might be useful. I packed a pipe carefully, lit it, and went back to the rendezvous. Elaine was waiting for me, calm, with the superficial traces of emotion carefully expunged. We walked slowly towards the steps and up into Bishops-gate.

"Shall we go to a cinema?" I suggested. "They're dark, and one needn't look at the pictures."

"I'd rather walk," she said, "if you feel up to it. You wouldn't rather get home?"

"We'll walk," I said.

We turned left and walked slowly northwards.

Elaine said: "It was sweet of you to think of that. I feel much better now." She put her arm in mine. "I wouldn't mind—not so much," she said in a low voice, "if he wasn't going to someone else. Of course that's feminine. Of course I didn't—I hadn't any claim—he never said anything, he was only just—friendly, and sweet. I shouldn't have thought of—I mean, I shouldn't have let myself get an ownership complex. It was my fault."

I wanted to say that he would return again soon, in less than a week perhaps. I held it back, not because it was dishonest, but because it might be the seed of a futile hope.

"We all felt like that," I said.

"I know."

"And you know, he won't just forget about us. He's not like that, not now."

"No."

I was tired, but my legs felt good enough. We could walk as far as we felt inclined and take a bus back. The last of the daylight

had gone now. The high buildings still kept the warm air between them and the pavement seemed to have retained some of the heat which had burnt it all through the day, but I could feel on my damp forehead the first breath of a summer evening's breeze. On the polished roadway the traffic ran faster than an hour before, and with the office men gone home to their suburbs its fury of purpose seemed to have dwindled to a kind of gaiety. The importance had gone. The buildings, monstrosities of overweening industry, were still standing upon the scene, too heavy to be shifted, but they were mostly empty and unlighted, and with every jerk of a minute-hand the city slid back a little towards its other self, its private personality; a town with its own citizens living—somewhere—in its own streets; a respectable, petty-bourgeois place, with women gossiping at the corner, only a little tired and tawdry after the commotion of the self-important visitors who had thronged the streets all day. At Shoreditch Station there was a bustle, and we had to wait to cross the road; but it was a provincial bustle, the bustle of Leeds and Nottingham. I felt, as we passed the police-station in Kingsland Road, that the Capital had taken off its morning coat to reveal itself in shirt-sleeves, a modest person who would clean the boots or mend a tap-washer.

"You're not getting tired?" Elaine asked me.

"No. Are you?"

"No, I like walking."

So much the better, I thought, if she could exhaust herself and then sleep deeply. My own legs would hold out; they were protesting, but in the increasing coolness I had spirit enough to drive them.

There were others who had thought to take a walk on this fine evening. The shops were all shut long since; I saw a fish-bar open, but it was empty. It was too early for the cinemas to be closing, and only a few men came out as we passed the public houses, but the pavements grew more crowded at every turning. The people were walking in the same direction as we, hardly one passed us going citywards, and by the time we reached the hospital it would have been hard to make one's way against the crowd, which had spilt over into the roadway and which swelled by degrees until the overflow of both pavements joined in the middle, the whole street thronged with the advancing multitude. Elaine gripped my arm tighter, but said nothing. We walked faster, keeping pace with our hurrying neighbours, who walked with little heed to their age or infirmity. I saw a man on crutches, his face white with the pain of his exertion, keeping up with the rest. A few were left behind; wrinkled old

women in long and heavy petticoats, whose tiny steps however nimble would not match them against the men's long stride; thin, tired girls who bit their lips and fought to stay level, but whose failing breath made them fall back to the hinder ranks. I saw old men running on their corn-tortured feet to keep up, a woman who with determination far beyond her strength pushed a baby in a perambulator with one hand and dragged a reluctant child with the other. There were Jews in the crowd, walking with hands in pockets, scornful and a little nervous, darting apprehensive glances from side to side. They alone seemed doubtful, as if uncertain whether they were on the right road. The rest had their eyes strained forward, trying to see something over the heads of the throng in front; dodging, when they found an opening, to get a position a little further up the file in the hope that they might see better. We had reached Stoke Newington, but we still pressed forward, and apparently the object of our pilgrimage was no nearer. I thought there might be a factory fire, and I scanned the sky ahead for the dreadful glow that would betoken it; but the sky was dark and serene, with the stars showing. An eager little man had pushed his way up beside me, a short red-faced man with a little red moustache and his right arm in a sling. I asked him: "Where are they all going?" He was ahead of me before I had finished the question, but he turned to answer me over his shoulder. "Towards Edmonton." "But why?" "I don't know. They must go somewhere. Perhaps they've nothing better to do." I said to Elaine: "We'd better get out of this," but she answered, "I rather like it. Besides, we couldn't," and we were swept on steadily, through the High Street, up Stamford Hill. It would have been hard indeed from where we were now, right in the middle of the road, to press our way out and escape through a side street. For we were pushed forward, we seemed almost to be dragged forward by the suction of the column moving in front. There was no banner above that advancing army, nor any war-cry shouted. We were silent mostly, expectant, wondering if those ahead could yet see what was hidden from us. An urchin, squeezing between the people's legs, was whistling huskily, loud enough for me to catch the air, and inevitably I recognized it. *The snowdrop's shooting up, up.* But the rest frowned upon his irreverence, or with heads high above the urchin's ignored it. There were foreigners in the crowd, Italians and Portuguese, negroes whose swollen lips smiled vacantly at the moving wall before them, gipsy women who might have had a trace of Arab blood, smart little Japanese gentlemen walking in couples, narrow-faced Greeks, commercial travellers by their attire, with eyes aimed at any opening between the shoulders in front, as if they were

after business; I saw a tall Indian, vulgarly clothed in a cheap grey suit and a butterfly collar, but reminding me, with his serious eyes, his dignity and easy swinging gait, of a Sikh pilgrim I had once met, walking alone on the straight sandy road which leads south from Batala. I saw coloured boxers and painted prostitutes, a grave business man and a priest walking side by side with anxious faces. There was a sailor in wide trousers who rolled as he walked; a stooping grey-haired man immaculately clad, his hands in his jacket pockets, who with the ragged costers and drab tradesmen pressing against him still seemed to walk apart. I asked, again and again, "Where are we going? Where's everyone walking to?" and some ignored me, while some smiled and others shrugged their shoulders. No one could give me an answer. But I was content to be carried on, drowsy now, the ache in my legs forgotten, fascinated with the unbroken tramp and clatter of hundreds of feet upon the roadway. "Let's just go on," Elaine repeated, "let's just keep going, it doesn't matter where we get to." And we strode on, keeping our own now, gaining a little, along the High Road, past Broad Lane, past Bruce Grove, past the football ground, gathering as we went, from the heat and smell of the crowd, from the noise of tramping feet, from the silent determination and the united courage, a new sense of quivering exaltation.

Except for the costers' barrows manfully thrust forward through the crowd by wiry little cockneys, a perambulator here and there, and a few wheeled soapboxes, we had cut off all traffic by our usurpation of the roadway. But a determined omnibus had been moving along some distance behind us, gently pushing its mudguards against the men who blocked its way, gradually gaining. Somewhere in the Tottenham High Road it drew level, and as I was thrust sideways by the men clearing its track I saw, looking up, that it was half-empty. I shouldered my way towards it, dragging Elaine with me, and called to the conductor: "Can we get on?" He shouted back: "Yes, if you've got the fare." It would not wait, but we plunged towards the steps, our neighbours helping us, and climbed on board.

I said to Elaine: "I'm sorry, but I'm not a fit man. I thought I'd better."

Perhaps she was disappointed, for her young legs would have carried her much farther, and the bus's windows shut us off from the friendly throng without, reflecting only our own sweat-streamed faces. But she said:

"Of course, Uncle, I shouldn't have made you go so far."

The conductor came for our fare and I gave him half a crown. "As far as you're going," I said. He gave me two tickets and some

change, which I slipped, unexamined, into my pocket. Elaine leant her head on my shoulder, and for mine I found a place between the seat and the window. I closed my eyes, but they still saw the faces of the crowd outside; my feet, at rest now, still seemed to march with the tramping feet upon the roadway.

When I opened my eyes the bus had stopped and I saw the conductor stooping over me.

"We're turning round now," he said.

Elaine woke with a little cry. We got up, rubbed our eyes, stretched, said "Good night" to the conductor and got out. We stood, sleepy and shivering, watched the bus back into a side road, and saw it speed away from us towards the point, perhaps a mile distant, where a single light showed near the road. Only when the noise had died away and we could hardly see the flickering tail-lamp did it occur to me to say, foolishly:

"We ought to have stayed on. We're stranded."

Elaine said, without much merriment, "What fun!"

Her arm was in mine again and she began to lead me, not where the bus had gone, but in the other direction. I did not resist. My feet were sore but my legs were rested, and the cool air gave me new vigour. We walked slowly, but the exercise was enough to warm me, and I thought "As well this way as the other. We'll come to a place where we can sleep."

Coming gradually to life, I realized that we were on a main road, hard and straight, lined with telegraph poles. There was no moon, though the whole sky was shining with stars, and I saw nothing which would tell me where we were. I struck a match to see my watch. It had stopped, through my neglecting to wind it, but the feel of the night and the fact that no car had passed us gave me the impression that it was on towards one in the morning, later perhaps. I was still faintly surprised that the crowd had vanished. To the left the ground rose to a wooded ridge. On the other side, through gaps in the high hedgerow, I could see only a field that stretched for fifty yards or so, to where another hedge abruptly cut off the view. From that side came a faint smell of midden, rarefied in the night's coolness. Somewhere in the deep ditch on our left a frog croaked, and I thought that I could hear the distant gurgle of a little waterfall. Except for the sound of our feet on the macadam there were no other noises. We walked on steadily, bemused by the curtain of stars.

A mile on, Elaine asked me:

"Where is he now?"

Startled by the question, I answered without thinking:

"I thought he was with us in the crowd . . . I don't know. I mean. . . ."

"I mean," she said patiently, ignoring my stupidity, "how far has he got now?"

"I don't know."

I stared over the hedge on our right, instinctively trying to gaze as far as the coast, and farther, to the line of dotted lights creeping over the dark sea. I thought that out in that direction I could faintly see the Hook, in the white, misty light of early morning, the smooth water of the Nicuwe Waterweg, the Customs House and station roofs, the green country behind.

I said: "He's asleep now. He won't go very far away. It won't be farther than parts of Scotland."

"There's the sea," she said mournfully.

I could only hold her arm more tightly. There was no other comfort for me to give her.

"He shouldn't have come," she said with sudden passion. "He was a thief and a trespasser." Her voice grew lower, but it still quivered with unspent emotion. "People come and make a hole in you. When it's animals, it's not their fault, but human beings needn't. They make a hole and they go away and leave it. And every part of it feels the soreness of what's been torn away."

We had been climbing steadily, and had reached the crest of the rise. The ground fell away before us, and the sky swept down to a level below our feet, so that we seemed alone, unworlded, in the serene universe of stars. We could smell the soil still, but the earth was dark and shapeless, waiting to be created. It was for us, the vast night, the sky unclouded, the limitless depth of heaven.

I said, faltering: "We loved him because he was a kind person. I don't think he'd ever have been unkind, not purposely. When I think of him I think of his eyes, and his lips smiling. It hurts, but when it hurts I see him more clearly. It becomes—fixed in me, part of me. You know, there were men in the war I remember like that. It used to hurt so much that I tried not to think about them. But I knew they'd been kind, they'd always been decent, you felt the kindness even when they'd been ripped into fragments by the shrapnel. They'd added something to life. I think that's what—makes the thing worth it. People add something. They get something given them as a sort of seed—I think they get it from Galilee—and they add something, and they suffer, and it piles up. You can't see it all, but you feel the weight of it, driving against cruelty and evil."

I broke off, feeling that it was useless, that my lips only cheapened

the high mystery. What I meant was there, encircling us, shining at us through a million miles of glorious stillness. It could not be spoken.

"It's beauty," I said wildly, "it goes on like a flame, it can't perish."

She answered in a whisper: "I understand."

We went on down the hill, over a bridge that crossed a little stream, on for a steady mile till the road swung left and began to rise again. Our second strength was still fresh in us, and we started up with pace unslackening. We overtook, a little way up the hill, a man and woman walking close together, arm-in-arm. They had been ahead of us in the crowd, I fancied. I do not think that Elaine saw them, but the man turned as we passed and I recognized him.

Bending towards him I whispered: "I did what I could. He wanted to go back. I hope it's all right."

He smiled and stretched out his arm towards me. I felt the touch of his finger on my hand, soft as a snowflake but warm as the fur of a kitten. There was reassurance in that touch and smile.

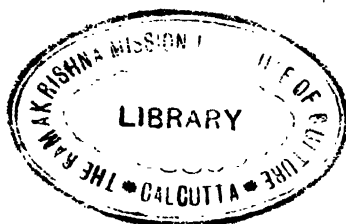
We went on steadily, through a dark and silent village the name of which I could nowhere see to read, and the only living soul we met was a night watchman who guarded the piles of stone and gravel where a stretch of roadway was under repair. He sat smoking in his little tent, his fire bright and fragrant, and we stopped to ask him where we were. "You'll be in Hertford Town if you go on long enough," was all he could tell us. "Another fine day to come?" I asked. He got up on his rheumatically legs and leaned out to look at the sky. I saw with surprise that already there was a glimmer of light on the eastern horizon. "It may come wet or fine," he said, "I shouldn't be surprised." But I thought it would be fine.

Our legs took us on mechanically. We walked as if sleeping, our eyes only half-open; worn out, but I at least content with that night's occupation. I whistled softly for our courage, and though Elaine was silent I saw that her lips were pursed for whistling. She said once, "I wish we could just go on walking, with nothing but the stars. I don't want to wake up." But the stars already were dimming. I heard her murmur, or perhaps it was only my mind's voice murmuring,

*Hé quoi ! n'en pourrions-nous fixer au moins la trace ?
Quoi ! passés pour jamais ? quoi ! tout entiers perdus ?
Ce temps qui les donna, ce temps qui les efface,
Ne nous les rendra plus ?*

He was close to us now, and he could not stay so close when the light came.

Towards morning the wind freshened, set the leaves quivering and woke the chaffinches. A few stars lingered, but the dark sea in which they shone grew fainter, seemed to dissolve away. We left the road, to cross a stile and take a narrow footpath leading to a larch wood. There it was still night, but looking up through the swaying cloud of leaves we could see the light breaking, and the creatures in the undergrowth seemed to know that it was time. The mossy path led us steeply down, and we crossed on a single plank over the hollow of a dried-up stream. Then, in a sharp climb, we reached the edge of the wood and stood in a broad meadow, where the cows were grazing as if it had long been day. The meadow sloped down to a red farm, and beyond, at the foot of the valley, we saw a church with clustering cottages. From one chimney the smoke was already rising. We sat there, on a little mound of turf, and ate our chocolate. The sky became pale blue, green-tinged, liquid and transparent. A film of rose crept over, upwards, changed to gold, and vanished. The sky began to harden, changed to a richer blue. We waited, wondering dumbly what would happen; and the sun rose gloriously. The world was still our own, and we gazed at it with sleepy eyes, the fresh wind bathing our faces. We did not sleep, but we stayed there, silent and reposing, till the sound of the church clock striking floated up to our ears. Then we crossed over the soft grass, the cows ignoring us, and went out through the farmyard into the lane. Holding hands, we made our way with shaky legs, on the rough track, down towards the village.



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